# C.O.R.E.

## Rulebook

## (or everything you needed to know to create or play a game with the Chupa Open Rules Engine)

## C.O.R.E. version 2.0 – alpha 6



## Welcome to Chupacabra Studios,

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Here is the scene. In a dimly lit saloon, the three of you sit down and join a game of five card stud. Your opponents are regulars with bad reputations. They carry a lot of coins, but they are experienced and ruthless. The saloon's owner, Grit Gray, sends you greasy smile from across the table. Seated to his left is a professional gambler called Lucy the Lucky. You'll be gambling against these two and against each other. I want each of you three to declare an action that represents what you are doing during the

twenty minutes of card playing. Your actions will take place simultaneously. The outcome of the initial twenty minutes will be settled as a single opposed conflict roll, and the person who rolls his dice best will win. If you are still in the game after that, the opponents will turn aggressive and try to take everything you have. Who wants to declare first?

My character has a good Mind Attribute score. He will try something a little sneaky. He'll start counting the cards. He'll bet big when he is ninety percent certain that I have the best cards in a hand.

**This is definitely a Mind conflict. Add your Mind Attribute score and your Gambling Skill Score to your roll of the die. If your total is highest, you'll win the big pot. If you fail, you will loose half of your coins and a point of Mental Energy due to frustration. Agreed?**

Yeah, that's sounds good.

*My character's Mind Attribute isn't that good, but his Social Attribute is better. I would like to read the Grit and Lucy. I'm hoping to notice if either of them has a tell or if they are subtly communicating with each other. After about ten hands of this, I'm going to bluff and take in as many coins as I can in a single round.*

**That is a Social attack. You will add your Social Attribute score and your Gambling Skill score to your die roll. If your total is highest, you'll get the information you want and bluff your way into the big pot. If you fail, you will loose half of your money, and you will loose a point of energy from your Social Attribute due to a loss of respect. Agreed?**

*Can I increase my chances by going all in?*

**Do you want to bet everything you have in a single hand?**

*Yes, that should scare away someone I would think.*

**Okay, add an additional two points to your die roll. If you still fail, you will lose all of your coins and two points of energy from your Social. Can we agree on these terms?**

*Yes, that is exactly what I want.*

I WANT TO CHEAT.

**What? How are you doing that?**

I'M PALMING THE FIRST GOOD CARD I GET, FOLDING THAT HAND, AND USING THE GOOD CARD LATER. I'LL ALSO DEAL FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE DECK. I'LL EVEN MARK A CARD BY SUBTLY BENDING ONE CORNER. I'LL KEEP CHANGING TACTICS SO THAT EVEN IF SOMEONE THINKS THEY SEE ME DOING SOMETHING SUSPICIOUS, THEY WON'T SEE THE SAME TRICK TWICE.

**These are primarily tricks of dexterity and quickness of your hands, so we'll call this a Body attack, like when you shot that cattle rustler earlier. This time, instead of using your Combat Skill, we'll use your Skullduggery Skill. That's Body plus Skullduggery plus your die roll. If your roll beats out the others, you'll win the big pot. If you fail, you'll be caught cheating, and Grit will try shoot you were you sit.**

I HAVE A TALENT CALLED "FAST DRAW." IT USUALLY HELPS ME TO SHOOT FIRST IF I PAY A POINT OF BODY ENERGY. CAN I USE THAT WHEN DEALING FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE DECK ALSO?

**Okay, subtract one point of energy from your Body Attribute right now. When you roll your die,**

**add your Body Attribute minus one point, and then add your Skullduggery and another two points for the Fast Draw. Keep in mind that the point you spend applies to more than just this one conflict roll. If a fight does happen, you'll have one less point of Body Energy for that conflict also. Agreed?**

AGREED! I'M READY TO CLEAN OUT THIS JOINT.

**You all know how to figure your totals. I will roll for Grit and Grace. If none of you three win, Grace will begin picking you off one by one. Everyone, roll your dice!**

# Introduction

**Welcome to C.O.R.E., the Chupa Open Roleplaying Engine. Developed by the listeners of the Dragon's Landing Podcast and their chupacabra mascot, C.O.R.E. is an excellent introduction for new roleplayers. C.O.R.E. will also appeal to many experienced gamers because it was designed for speed and story.**

## Slow Down! What exactly is Roleplaying? Is this a story?

In a way, yes, it is a story. A roleplaying adventure is group-scripted story which works as a game. You can take on the role of the hero – or the sidekick, or the villain, or anyone else. Roleplaying games are stories where you can do anything you want, when you want. There are some rules to provide challenge to the players, but how your character acts is mostly up to you.

This role-playing system needs a minimum of two people to play, a Director and an Actor. You may be either one. Other systems call these participants other names, but for simplicity, we will stick with the terms, "Director" and "Actor" just like on a movie set. The Director is the person who creates an adventure for her Actor or Actors to explore. The Actor creates a character with skills, abilities and backgrounds for himself. In the example above, the Director is addressing her three Actors about a scene which takes place during a poker game in a saloon. Sometimes the Director knows about the details of the adventure, and other times she makes them up as she proceeds. For example, she might know who the baddies are, what they're doing, and where treasure is located. She would then give the Actor an introduction to the adventure and explain how and where his adventure begins. The Actor decides what his character wants to do, and the Director decides how difficult it would be to do that. The character will tend to use his best abilities, but sometimes he will be forced into activities which he doesn't often do as well. After an adventure, maybe the Actor's character has survived. The Director would then give the that character Story Points in recognition for experience gained. The Actor can spend these points to gain further abilities. The Actor could then use this improved character in another adventure, and then another, and then another... That is the basic idea of a role playing game.

# What exactly is C.O.R.E.?

*C.O.R.E.* is a set of rules intended to serve as the foundation for other settings and systems to be developed later. Games can be easily played without any modifications and using only this book, but the system is only a basic guide and lacks rules for many specific things. For example, there are no rules for magic that would be specific to a certain setting or genre. Additional modules can be easily plugged into the core system. You will find all of the information you need in those modules to create a character, fight foes, and play through exciting adventures.

The rules found in this book are very basic and are perfect for one-shot games, convention games, and new roleplayers. Groups that prefer extremely simple and streamlined systems that do not get in the way will also find this system a good match. We encourage you to join in the fun and create your own modules to share with everyone else. It was the community that created the game, and giving back to this community is the best way to help it grow and succeed.

# What Is This Book?

The C.O.R.E. Studio Guidebook provides the mechanics necessary to play in a C.O.R.E. game. C.O.R.E. is also sometimes also called "Project Chupa" so to avoid confusion with other systems that sometimes use the terms "core rules" or "core books." This document provides information in a very generic way: no specific attributes, skills, nor anything else is mentioned during this book except as examples. The lack of specifics is not to create confusion but to remove some of the confusion that occurred in the version 1.0 release of the rules. Because C.O.R.E. is intended as a modular system that can be used in a wide variety of settings, the inclusion of standard sets of attributes, skills, et cetera in the base rules provided more confusion than clarity. Hopefully, splitting the rules up into two different books — this document with basic system rules and a module of setting information — will help to clear up these issues.

This book is divided into chapters called "Acts" and sub-sections called "Scenes." Here is what you'll find in each act of the C.O.R.E. rules.

**Act 1: Character:** This section covers the basics you need to know to create a character. It starts by introducing the simple mechanics used throughout the game and then covers attributes, skills, and talents, and how they are used within the game. Then come Backstories: a method for creating a character that is fast, fun, and easy, yet still provides for lots of roleplaying possibilities. There are eight steps to creating a fully-fleshed out character— something that can be done in as little as 20 minutes.

**Act 2: Conflict:** This act provides the means to actually run characters through the

conflicts that arise within the story. Stars are the characters who are being roleplayed in the story, and they always have to deal with conflicts. In C.O.R.E.*,* conflicts can be anything. The term is not reserved for physical confrontations. Arguments, puzzles, magic rituals, and barroom brawls are all examples of conflicts.

        **Act 3: Director's Notes:** The third act is a compilation of advice for running a game of C.O.R.E. It includes recommendations for running specific types of scenes, optional rules for the use of props, and an example of a scene being roleplayed.

        **Act 4: The Stage:** This act provides guidance for Directors who are creating new settings. It provides advice on creating setting-specific attributes, skills, talents and backstories, as well as some ideas to streamline campaign creation.

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# Act 1:  Character

## Scene 1:  The Basics

### A Few Terms You Should Know

Since *C.O.R.E.* is designed with a cinematic feel in mind, several terms were ripped straight from the movie set and put to use here. Knowing these terms will keep you from getting lost while reading the rules.

**Actor.** This is a player who guides his Star through a story provided by the Director.

**Star.** This is a character whom the player controls and roleplays during the game. The Actor often creates his Star's backstories and personality. Then, the players steers that character through the mayhem that is sure to follow. Occasionally, some pre-generated characters could be prepared by the Director if the game requires specific characters for a specific story. Pre-generated characters are particularly common in games held at gaming conventions.

**Cast.** This is the entire group of Actors together.

**Guest Star.** This is a Star who appears infrequently or only once alongside the regular cast. This is most commonly a pre-generated character given to an Actor who attends a game infrequently.

**Director.** This is the person who runs the game. She describes the world to the Actors, plays the

roles of all of the Extras, and tries to keep the game running smoothly. When disagreements happen while playing the game, she is the person responsible for settling them. In other words, her word is law. Be nice to her.

**Effects or Special Effects or FX.** These are powers which are available to characters within a certain setting. A crime drama might have no Special Effects, but a science-fiction-crime-drama might have assassin-nanites and clairvoyant police detectives. Magic spells, psychic powers, space aliens, and mystical martial arts are all Special Effects.

**Episode.** This is a roleplaying session. Ideally, each small story will be one Episode and each Episode will be one story.

**Extras or Supporting Cast.** These are all of the characters in the game that are not controlled by the players. Extras are usually controlled by the Director, though there are exceptions. Sometime an extra might be controlled by another player who are there only there for one game session and is assisting the Director.

**Party.** This is the entire group of Stars together.

**Props.** Most items are just called "items." Items include any items that a Star might use in a Story, from a pencil to a sword. Depending on the setting, even powerful objects like heavy weapons and super-computers can be items. Props are special items which have their own extra abilities or powers above and beyond other items. These abilities or powers take the form of Talents just like characters have Talents. A magic wand which can change people into chupacabras would be a Prop, but so would a specially built shotgun which fires a heavy slug designed to knock horse-thieves off their horses. Props are optional and will not appear in all C.O.R.E. games.

**Rehearsal Points.** Rehearsal Points are a specific type of story point. Most games use only basic story points, but some might differentiate between rehearsal points and story points and use them differently. Rehearsal Points and Story Points are explained in much greater detail in Act 3, the Director's Section.

**Scene.** A unit of narrative time encapsulating a single set of events. A scene changes when two of these parameters change: place, time, actions, or people involved. In this document, the term "scene" is also used to designate a certain portion of the text for organization.

**Guidebook.** This document you are reading is the Guidebook. It includes all of the rules and explanations needed to run a roleplaying game in any genre. Specific games and settings have their own sourcebooks, called Screenplays.

**Screenplays or Scriptbooks.** These documents offer additional rules and information about a specific setting or story for use with C.O.R.E. Screenplays don't feature the exact dialog and events of a story, but they may include example scenes written as such.

**Series.** A series is a set of episodes which allow the cast to play as the same Stars in the same setting.

**Story Points.** A commodity which is earned by players through roleplaying and used to affect

small changes in the story.

**Talents or Gimmicks or Schticks.** These are special or unusual abilities which the Stars possess. Anything ranging from a magic spell to mastery of a skill is a Talent. The list of available Talents will vary from one setting to another.

## Optional Rules

All rules in C.O.R.E. are subject to change. Some rules, however, are more fundamental than others. For this reason, some certain sections of text in this document will be designated with boxes, and where possible, Arial italicized fonts. This designation means that these optional rules are mere suggestions. A simple and straightforward game with C.O.R.E. requires none of the optional rules and still works quite well. The optional rules, like the inclusion of Props, are included for those gamers who want a more tactical or challenging experience.

> *All optional rules are optional. An optional rule will look like this paragraph. Optional rules might include extra abilities for a Star, a rules complication, or a Director's trick for making a game more memorable and interesting.*

# Dice Notation

All rolls will be made using one or more ten-sided dice. When more than one die is used, only the highest value is kept. Discard the lower rolls. To notate a roll of the dice, the following convention is used:

**[#] d10 [+/- modifiers]**

*Example:* 2d10 + 4 means "Roll 2 ten-sided dice. Keep the single highest value. Then add 4."

## Basic Task Resolution System

All rolls use the same system to determine success or failure. That system is as follows:

**d10 roll + relevant attribute + relevant skill + any modifiers vs. a target number**

The modifiers and the target number are determined by the type of task. If the roll plus all modifiers is equal to, or higher than, the target number then the roll is a success. Otherwise, it is a failure.

If the highest roll on the dice is a 10, it is not an automatic success. If the highest roll on the dice was a 1, it is not an automatic failure. That roll of 1 on the die does indicate, however, that a story-based difficulty happens as a direct result.

# Scene 2: Attributes

## When you strip away all that a hero has learned throughout their life — the skills, the knowledge, impact their histories have had on them — what are you left with? You have the core of their character: their attributes.

### What Are Attributes?

Attributes represent the base abilities of a Star. They are not the skills the Stars have developed throughout their lifetime, but their raw force of personality, strength, etc. Each setting will have 4 attributes. The name and description of these attributes will be customized for each setting. A traditional fantasy setting may use *Brawn, Brains, Social*, and *Magic* attributes to represent the breadth of activities the Stars will be doing. However, a setting where the Stars are Roman senators and the play focuses more on the politics will require different attributes. The senators might have *Charisma, Honor, Wealth*, and *Influence*. And a modern-day government agency horror setting might use *Fitness*, *Wits*, *Perception*, and *Sanity*.

**Attributes have a maximum value of 5.**

### *Attribute Descriptions*

*Attributes provide a very broad idea of the character. They do not give any specifics about how powerful that attribute might be nor with how much finesse the character can use with it. Many times, this is much broader than we would like. Enter Attribute Descriptions.*

*Attribute descriptions are a single, short phrase — no more than a handful of words in length — that tells us when the character's strength in that attribute comes into play. Basically, if you had to describe that attribute in words only (no numbers), what would you say? Perhaps your character does heavy physical labor at a factory that requires him to lift 100 pound bags all day long. You might call his Physical attribute "Strong as a bull." Maybe your character is very blunt, almost to the point of being abrasive. His Social attribute might be described as "Too truthful," or "Blunt and to the point."*

*There are two types of Attribute Descriptions: strengths and weaknesses. Strengths gain the character a +2 bonus when the Director agrees that the description is applicable. A weakness causes a -2 penalty when the she thinks the description is applicable.*

*When a character is first created, he gets one set of attribute descriptions for each attribute. As play continues, Directors may reward — or curse — Stars with new attribute descriptions in any attribute.*

*Descriptions are the most common and arguably the best optional rules in the game. By adding more descriptions, players may make games as complex and intricate as they prefer. Thus, the descriptions can be considered the advanced rules of C.O.R.E.*

# Scene 3: Skills

*No matter how strong a character might be, he cannot defeat a smaller man trained in the martial arts. No matter his intelligence, without training he will never crack the cipher in time. No matter how much natural charisma, he will suffer in politics without guidance. No matter his natural aptitude in magic, without study, he is more likely to change himself into a newt.*

# What are Skills?

Where attributes describe the raw talents of the characters, it is the skills a character possesses that can mean the difference between life and death. They are the learned abilities that Stars acquire throughout their lifetimes. Skills are broad in scope, and do not focus on every little ability possible within a world. Instead of a list of 50 skills, a setting may have only 10 or 15 that are needed. They focus on what is important to that setting, and leave the things that do not make a character special compared to the common person to be handled by Talents or through the story itself.

Our fantasy heroes game might have *Ranged Combat, Melee Combat, Sneak, Craft*, *Sorcery*, etc. Our Roman senators game may be using skills like *Rhetoric, Investing, Leadership, Languages, Tactics*, and more. The government agents might require *Firearms, Forensics, Occult, Computers, Ancient Languages* or even *Larceny*.

**Skills have a maximum value of 5.** Everyone is allowed to use a skill, even if they do not have any bonuses in that skill.

## *Skill Descriptions*

*Just like attribute descriptions, skill descriptions provide a more detailed look at your abilities. They detail what aspects within the broad description of the skill that the Star has focused on, or is incapable of doing. A fantasy warrior might choose a Melee Combat description of "long sword", or "rapier", where his roman cousin might instead focus on "short sword" or "spear".*

# Scene 4: Talents

**All perfect villains hold a secret in reserve for the day they desperately need a surprise. So does every hero. Talents take characters beyond their normal abilities into areas that are often seemingly supernatural.**

## *What Are Talents?*

Talents are special abilities that characters possess. They might be a racial ability, or a certain style of fighting that only a particular family can teach. Talents may be more mundane, also, like the ability to always find the right type of contacts when one needs them, or always managing to keep small items hidden on oneself.

Talents can be thought of as *enablers*. They do not always provide a skill set, but might enable you to use certain abilities. Magic is a perfect example. Perhaps not everyone in the world can cast magic, only a few who are born with that talent.

Beginning characters are always given one free Talent. Stars can get more talents only by spending Story Points on them. There is no maximum number of Talents. You may only take a Talent once unless the description says otherwise.

Talents generally have both a Purchase Cost and a Use Cost. The Purchase Cost tells you how many Story Points are required to buy that talent for your Star. The Use Cost tells you how many Attribute Points must be temporarily spent to use that Talent. Some Talents may allow you to use Story Points instead of Attribute Points. In the saloon scene at the beginning of the book, the third Star was using a Talent of Fast Draw which involved spending a point of Body Energy.

Here are two examples of Talents so you may get a feel for how they work:

**The Hidden Pocket**
This Talent allows a character to be adapt at hiding objects on his person. No matter how carefully searched the character has been, he may pull an inexpensive, small (hand-sized) item off her person with a successful Conflict Roll using the Skullduggery Skill.
Purchase Cost: 1 Story Point
Use Cost: 1 Mental

**Skill Mastery**
This talent provides super-human mastery in skills. When bought, the player chooses one skill that he is a Master of. For each rank of Mastery, they roll a bonus d10 during all conflicts involving that skill. A minimum skill score of 3 is required to purchase Skill Mastery for that Skill. Only the highest die roll is counted.
This Talent can be bought more than once. Each time this talent is purchased for the same skill, an additional die is used during skill checks. However, the minimum skill score goes up by 1 for each rank in Skill Mastery. A minimum of 3 is needed for 1 rank (which means rolling 2d10). Minimum score of 4 in order to have 2 ranks (which results in rolls of 3d10), and only a Star with a skill score of 5 may take 3 ranks of Skill Mastery (and rolls 4d10).
Purchase Cost: 5 Story Points
Use Cost: none

# Scene 5: Backstory

## What happened that turned your favorite character into who they are today? What events triggered the insanity that bred your favorite villain? It is all covered in his history, his Backstory.

### What Is Backstory?

Backstory is the sum of events that happened to the characters before the game started. Many times, players will write a general history of the characters, complete with the most important events that made that characters who they are today. Often, this is fine, and the player can spend points through their character to make the numbers match the backstory. Some times, though, we are playing after a long day of work and are tired enough that our muse is not working as well as we might wish.

This Backstory is divided into four life stages. They are: Childhood, Education, Passion, and Career. Each event tells the major way the character's life went during that life stage. During childhood, you might have been an *Orphan*, a *Child Laborer*, or even *Created*, not born. Your education might have been on the streets as a *Criminal*, or as a brat in a *Military School*. Each Backstory stage adds to your attributes and skills until — after all four stages are chosen — you have a nearly complete character.

### Using Backstory

Stars are created by choosing one event from each life stage. Childhood, Education, and Passion each give one or more points in a single attribute and a single skill. Careers give you three points in attributes and two skills.

There are two ways to use Backstory for creating a Star depending on your preference.

       **Backstory First.** This way helps you create your Star's history by choosing backstory events before you know your Star's history. You might have a general idea, and select from the events available during each life stage. Or you might start choosing interesting events, and then figure out who your Star is by creating stories that connect the events together. This works especially well to create well-rounded, highly roleplayable characters when you choose events that don't necessarily seem to go together at first glance.

       **History First.** If you already know your Star's history, then you should choose events during each life stage that come the closest to representing what you wrote down for their history. You won't always find a perfect match, but that just might spark some great character ideas by trying to explain the differences. At times, you will find it very easy to pick similar events at each life stage. This is not recommended. For example, if your Star is a career military person, you might be tempted to

make him a *Military Brat*, that was sent to *Military School* by his parents, and joined the *Military* as soon as he was able who spends his spare time training in *Martial Arts*. Yes, your Star will be a fantastic fighter but not much fun to play. Even if those are the events that were in your written history, you should find places to choose other events, and then modify your history to make this fit.

# Scene 6: Creating a Star

## Creating a Star is quick, easy, and fun. You do not need to set aside two hours just to get ready to play. Instead, take between 15 and 30 minutes and have a fully realized character. We know that other games have made this claim before, but we really mean it. You can quickly get to what you like best — playing the game.

Characters in C.O.R.E., are designed from the beginning to be able to contribute to the story and to the drama. They are built quickly by choosing from a number of available background options, and then given some flexibility to tweak the numbers, so that no two characters will ever be alike.

Here are the eight simple steps needed to create a character:

**1. Choose a concept.** The first thing you need is an idea. Write it down. Pass it by your Director and make any changes to fit better into the world. For the best roleplaying possibilities, leave big holes — or hooks — in your character background so that the Director can easily build your character's past into the campaign. This makes everyones job easier: you'll have more fun, because you're a real part of the story; and the Director doesn't have to spend hours trying to figure out how to work you into the game. Don't think in terms of game mechanics, but try to create a realistic person with goals, likes, and dislikes.

**2. Record your free abilities.** Your Star should be heroic, and able to do things the everyday person could not do. Put one point in each of your attributes before you even begin picking Backstoires. That way, you will have a slight chance to succeed even at tasks at which you aren't very good.

**3. Choose your Backstories.** Now that you have your background ready, look through each life stage in the Backstories (Childhood, Education, Passion, and Career) and pick one from each group. Each Backstory will have attributes and skill bonuses (or penalties) to assign to your Star. Write those down on your character sheet. Each group builds on the others, forming a nearly complete character in just this one simple step.

**4. Customize your skills.** Because even identical twins have different personalities, you need to add a little more customization to your Start. You get 4 points to spend in skills however you want.

**5. Choose your Talent.** Every Star has little skills or fantastic abilities that they can do. It is just another part of what makes your character ready to face the challenges that lie in store for them. Choose one Talent from the lists of Talents your world or Director has compiled. Even if you have designed your character to be an ordinary man stuck into extraordinary circumstances, you should be able to think of some particular talents or specialized skills which this character can do better than some others. Don't worry — you can get more later.

**6. Rehearse your part.** Each Star starts with 5 Rehearsal Points to spend on things like an additional Talent, extra skills, or even another point in an attribute. See the table later in this Act for the costs. For the purposes of spending points, a Rehearsal Point and a Story Point are considered the same thing.

Note: Check with your Director about the exact number of Rehearsal Points you get to start with. In some worlds or

systems, a higher power level will be desired.

**7. Choose Personal Goals.** Each Star should have personal goals that they are striving to complete during their lives. These could be finding a long-lost brother or avenging the murder of your parents. Choose no more than 3 goals at this point. When you successfully complete a goal, you can always choose a new one. Make sure you don't skip this point, though, since you can get story points from completing steps toward your personal goals.

**8. Flesh out the character.** One last step: simply give your Star a name, write down some notes about appearance, and any other details you need to really be able to get into your character. You are ready to play!

# Scene 7:
# Character Growth

During the life of the game, the characters will change and grow. This is an exciting part of playing the game. The basic method for character growth is Story Points. These are described in detail in Act 2: Scene 5.

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## *Improving Your Star*

*Story points are spent in various ways to improve your Star. They can either be spent on increasing attributes and skills, or adding new talents. In some cases, your Star might be able to create new items or research new spells with the use of story points.*

*There are some limits on how characters grow. **Increasing the same attribute or skill exclusively is not allowed.** That means you may never increase an attribute by more than one attribute point at a time, and you may never increase the same attribute twice in a row either. Similarly, may never increase an attribute by more than one attribute point at a time, and you may never increase the same attribute twice in a row either. In addition, you may not add two talents in a row.*

### *Advancement Costs*

- *Improve a skill by 1 point = 2 Story Points.*
- *Improve an attribute by 1 point = 5 Story Points.*
- *Add a talent = number of Story Points varies*

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## *The Training Montage*

*Before you can actually spend your story points to improve your Star or build something new, you must perform a Training Montage. This is a short description of the event that is the inspiration for what they are spending their story points on. This might be a flashback to a pivotal event that made them start learning this skill. It might be something that happened "off-screen" that helped them develop their current skill or gave them their new talent.*

*Each player gets their turn in front of the camera, so to speak, to describe their Training Montage at a specified time in the episode. The player should have fun and get creative with their narrative. Bringing props would be cool, too. If the montage is done well enough, or the story is cool enough, the Director might even*

*reward a bonus Story Point or two.*

*The event(s) described must be directly related to the improved attribute or skill. So, don't go skiing in the Aspens to increase your gambling skill, unless you can tie it in somehow. Maybe, the Star experiences a sudden flash of inspiration from the patterns of the trees? If you are creating a new item, or spell, or whatever, you should find a way to make the story of its creation or research exciting in some fashion, not just a retelling of the facts.*

*Like any story, training montages should be fun, exciting, and dramatic -- the more so, the better!*

## *Advancement through Backstories*

*Here is a different way to perform character advancement. A Star may instead advance by acquiring more backstories. This particularly makes sense if the story involves that character learning a new Career or developing a new Passion. With the Director's permission, an Actor may use Story Points to purchase a new Backstory in addition to the old. The Star then receives the bonuses which come with the Backstory.*

*For example, a Star in a Western story might start the Series as a Cowboy, laboring on his parent's farm. The youth is drafted into the army and becomes a Soldier. He deserts the army to become a Cattle Rustler. He moves up to more serious crimes, robbing banks and trains as an Outlaw. The Star redeems himself during the series, and he finally returns to his home town as a Pale Rider. These are five professions which together tell the story of the Star's character development throughout the Series.*

# Act 2:

# Conflicts

# Scene 1:

# Conflicts Defined

**A roleplaying session without conflict of various kinds is just plain boring. If the Stars can't get into a good argument or fight, or pull a fast one on the local curmudgeon, something is lacking. Just like reading a story, part of the excitement in RPGs comes from living through dangers and triumphs that we will never see in real life. It might be racing through the streets, chasing the burglar on your Harley; finding your way through the maze of Roman politics; or even defeating the evil Overlord through cunning, guts, and luck.**

Conflicts should be run fast and furious, so the flow of the game is not interrupted any more than it should be. To make this happen, the conflicts are divided into three different types so you only have to deal with the amount of detail needed for that conflict. Characters are encouraged by the rules to be both descriptive and daring, adding to everyones fun.

## What Is a Conflict?

Simply put, conflict happens when someone wants something and is opposed. A conflict can be a fight, a verbal argument, trying to squeeze the proper amount of venom out of snake's fang for a potion, or trying to wrest your opponent's control of magic away from them. Conflicts can be associated with each of the four attributes. They each form a different type of conflict, but all of them are resolved in the same way.

Using the fantasy world we saw in Act 1, we have the following attributes: *Brawn, Brains, Social,* and *Magic*. Here is a quick look at some possible conflicts for each attribute:

**Brawn**:
- Jumping onto a moving vehicle
- Running across a field and dodging the 50 arrows flying around you
- Fighting the villain one on one in the final Scene.

**Brains**:
- Solving a riddle
- Remembering the names and reputation of all the soldiers bearing down on you
- Realizing the water stain on the dresser actually means something

**Social:**
- Fast-talking your way past a guard
- Not making a fool of yourself at a royal ball
- Winning a battle of wits with your enemy

**Magic:**
- Properly using the name of the demon that wants to eat you
- Reading someones mind
- Perform the rain dance just right

Many times, you will find that a certain conflict can be handled using any of the attributes. During the conflict each player will be able to describe why they think a certain attribute should be used. To make this a little clearer, we'll use a card game in our fantasy world as an example. It's similar to the game we saw in the introductory story at the beginning of this document, but this time the characters have access to magic.

**Brawn.** The Star tries to win the game using physical methods of cheating like double-dealing, hiding cards, and similar methods.

**Brains**. The Star tries to win the game using their intellect, perhaps by counting cards.

**Social**. The Star tries to win the game using intimidation, bluffs, and reading the other players.

**Magic**. The Star tries to win the game by casting spells to increase his luck, reorder the deck, or even conjure cards he might need.

Each of these is a valid conflict, and Stars are encouraged to play to their strengths. Each type of conflict might have different types and costs of failure, so Stars might have to join in a conflict they're weaker in, just to survive the possible failure.

# More Conflicts in Action

Here is another example involving investigators in a supernatural mystery game with demons and cultists. The attributes in this game are Body, Mind, Social, and Supernatural.

"**Deep in the mine, all three of you see this. Two cultists armed with pick axes, leap out from behind crates. They don't say anything, but they do make their intentions known when they come at you swinging. The cultists are young**

and strong, but their hair is stark white and their complexion is a pasty pale gray. You each have one action before a cultist reaches you. That's three actions total, and then they attempt to bury their weapons into your skulls."

"I want to wrestle that pick axe away from the nearest cultist."

"That is a Body Attack. If you win, you'll disarm him. If you fail, you'll trip and injure yourself, losing one point of Body Energy."

"Can't I attempt to hurt him at the same time? I'm not being gentle with this cultist."

"Okay, if you win, the cultist will drop his weapon and get body slammed, losing one point of Body Energy himself. If you don't roll well, you lose the Body Energy point and you drop your flashlight."

"*My character knows a spell which might freeze them place. This is a Supernatural Attack, right?*"

"That's right. You'll use your Supernatural Attribute. Here are the terms. If you win, the spell will hold them in place so that all three cultists lose their next action. If you fail, there is no effect on the cultist and you lose a point of energy from your Supernatural Attribute."

"*I'd like to immobilize all three cultists if I can. If I fail this dice roll, I can pay an extra price. Maybe I could tap into whatever force cursed them and my hair will turn white also.*"

"I like that suggestion. Agreed!"

"I would like to try a Social Attack. I will target the second cultist and tell him that his mother was a paste-eater. I'll use my Mighty Blow Talent to make the insult really sting. The talent description tells me that I can boost the damage I inflict, and it does not have to necessarily be used with the Body attribute."

"Really? Really? Well, if you fail, you'll stutter and lose a point of Social Energy in frustration, and the cultist has no reservations about using violence against you. I'm not sure about the success terms. I don't understand what you're trying to accomplish."

"I want to make him cry."

"I like it. If you succeed, your cultist will weep like a baby and lose one point of Social Energy. Make that two points he'll lose because of your Mighty Blow. How's that?"

"Okay!"

"Your terms are all accepted. Actors, roll your dice."

# Scene 2:

# Difficulty Numbers

## What are Difficulty Numbers?

Difficulty numbers represent how difficult a conflict is. This is the number that the Star must meet or exceed in a conflict in order to be successful. There are three methods for determining the difficulty of an action, depending on if it is a direct conflict with another creature, or another type of conflict. Low difficulty numbers encourage risk-taking, but high difficulties force Stars to work together or rely upon their best traits to gain a good chance of succeeding.

It may seem that some conflicts can be too difficult for a single Star to accomplish mathematically, but this is not necessarily true. By spending story points, accepting damage, performing Stunts, or working with other Stars, every conflict should be able to be resolved. All of these options are explained in more detail later in this document; see Scene 9, *Boosting Your Chances*. In rare cases, however, the difficulty might be so high that the Stars cannot meet this conflict head-on. In these cases, the Director is encouraged to let the Stars revise their action and perhaps learn the better part of valor: running away.

Difficulty numbers typically range from 5 to 15, but they can go as high as 20. Three methods for determining difficulty numbers are outlined in the Director's section of this document.

**Scene 3:**

# Conflict Scope

# Every group has different elements of the game they like to focus on. Some groups like to get deep in the specifics of every combat, while other groups might like to detail only the conflicts that are most crucial to the story-line, speeding through less important conflicts in a single roll.

## What Is Conflict Scope?

Conflict Scope is a way to zoom in and out of the action going on around the Stars. It allows you to focus on only what is important to the story. At times, this will mean finally facing the villain and slowing the action down so that every blow, every witty repartee, and every time you draw a weapon is crucial. At other times, you might just want to get your Stars from point A to point B quickly, even though there is some potential danger involved in the journey.

By using all three types of conflicts, each gaming group can customize their experience based on what they find important. If you love the tactical decisions of war-gaming, you can have that. If you prefer fast-pacing and keeping your players on the edge of their seats, you can have that, too.

## Types of Conflicts

### Time-Lapse

Time-Lapse conflicts are all of the smaller conflicts that do not have any direct impact on the overall story. These could be haggling over the price of a horse, or mowing through the vast battalion of orcs that stand between you and your true enemy. These conflicts are handled with a single roll for the overall conflict. They often do not present much in the way of danger to the characters.

### Normal

Normal conflicts are those that have a small impact on how the story progresses, but not so crucial that the story would end if this conflict were lost. These types of conflict should definitely hold the possibility of danger and death, but doesn't necessarily need every little blow to be detailed. In the case of multiple opponents, you might separate each opponent into their own, individual conflict, but not worry about each swing of the sword or shot of the gun.

### Slow-Motion

Slow-Motion conflicts are vital to the story. The chance of death or ruination is very real. The iconic example of this is when the heroes finally reach the primary villain. Every strategy the players and villain can use to put their opponent off-balance should be another conflict. Every blow might be detailed depending on the group.

## Using Conflict Scope

Conflict scopes should be varied frequently. And always remember: it is the importance to the story, not the intensity of the physical combat that matters.

One moment, you'll be doing the Time-Lapse as the Stars sneak through a village full of enemy soldiers. Then someone fails a conflict and they're spotted by four soldiers playing a game of cards. The soldiers are not really a match for the Stars, especially since they're tripping as they're getting up from the card game they were playing, so you slip into a Normal conflict and the players all describe their wonderful antics as they quickly defeat the soldiers-- but not before the guards manage to sound an alarm.

The difficulty is harder now, but you Time-Lapse again. Finally, the Stars reach the gorge the soldiers were guarding. The Amulet

of Eradu is said to be just across this old, rickety rope bridge. The soldiers rush in on the Stars as they're making their way across the bridge. Here, death is very possible, and failure to cross the bridge and retrieve the Amulet is crucial to the story, so you go into a Slow-Motion conflict. The soldiers are cutting the ropes; a Star throws a dagger into the man's neck; a trap is set off and the Stars each have to react; and so on…

# Scene 4:

# Time Frames

While the system is designed to be flexible, frequently a reference is needed to how long a conflict lasts, or a spell effect lasts. To handle this, we use the following terms for defining time:

**Action.** A variable length of time that allows a character to perform some task.

**Episode.** A single playing session.

**Pilot.** An adventure meant to be played out in a single Episode. These are often referred to as "One Shots." Pilots are not meant to be part of a larger Series, but it might develop into that if the Actors want to continue it.

**Scene.** A series of character Actions that all take place in the same location.

**Story**. A self-contained adventure with a beginning, middle and end. It may take several Episodes to complete.

**Series.** The overarching story for the game, synonymous with a campaign in other systems, made up of one or more Stories.

# Scene 5:

# Energy

## What Is Energy?

Whether we are physically exhausted, hurt, or simply mentally drained from hours of magical research, our current ability to perform is hampered in nearly everything that we do. The amount of energy that a Star can put into actions is determined by the current score in the attribute they are using. As conflicts are failed, and risks taken, the current attribute score will vary, but will never exceed their actual attribute score.

When a Star suffers some form of damage, the damage is subtracted from the current score of the attribute used during the conflict. If you are in our fantasy world, have a Brawn Attribute of 3, and fail combat-conflict, you should lose 1 point of Brawn Energy. That would reduce your current Brawn score down to 2. Any new rolls made using Brawn would only have 2 points added to them, instead of the previous 3 points. While this has the potential to create a death spiral, there are some simple ways to recover the lost energy. The amount of energy lost in a Conflict Roll might be higher depending upon the danger of the scene.

## Recovering Energy

Attributes can be recovered in two simple ways, described below. Special situations may arise where your Director may also reward you attribute points as a bonus for success. Also, some types of equipment may be able to restore lost energy.

### Rest

Eight hours of sleep will fully restore all lost attributes points. If the sleep is interrupted, the Director will determine how much is restored.

### Healing Scenes

In order to recover lost attribute points between scenes, your character must make a Healing Scene. This is a simple narrative that the player makes showing how their character got their confidence or energy back. This will fully refresh one attribute.

Only one attribute can be healed between scenes. To recover other attributes, you must either rest for 8 hours or heal a different attribute after each scene.

When a player wishes to have a healing scene, they first let their Director know. Then they give a short narrative about what it is they did to restore those points. The narrative should be appropriate to the Star, relate directly to the attribute they want to restore, and be something the Star could do at their current location, unless the Director says they can go other places.

The key here is that it should be appropriate to the Star. Some Stars might restore lost Social points by taking some quiet time for themselves and meditating or by going to a rave where they can be around strangers where they can hit on people, or even by diving into the drink. They might restore lost Brawn by exercising, meditating, or even sparring.

The players should be creative in their narrative and have fun. If Healing Scenes become too frequent for the Director's preference, the Director can always give the Stars a goal to achieve within a certain number of scenes.

# Death and Dying

Dying does not happen randomly in *C.O.R.E.*. Instead, it will be the result of a failed conflict where the players and the Director agreed upon the terms. This allows the players to choose to make their deaths matter. It might be a sacrifice to save their party, or it might be the result of a specific spiritual ritual or quest that ends in the character's transcendence.

# Scene 6:

# Story Points

## What Are Story Points?

All of the Stars are involved in a heroic story. While they can't always succeed, the game would not be much fun if they always failed. Story points are a way for the Stars to get directly involved in the game. They can be used to increase a Star's odds at success, keep them from getting killed or badly injured, or even alter the story in small ways. Remember, though, that the Director gets story points for the supporting cast, too.

Story points should be represented by something physical like cards, poker chips, beads, or even your favorite candy.

Story points are also used in character growth, described earlier. At the end of an Episode, you may choose to either save the story points for the next game, or spend them to improve their character, create items, etc. No more than 5 points may be spent directly on your character at the end of any Episode. If you have talents that let you create items, spells, etc. you can spend extra story points on this.

## Getting Story Points

At the beginning of each Episode, the Stars are given 5 story points to use. If they have saved some points from previous episodes, these are added to their stack.

During the game, the Director will reward Stars for several situations, but the general rule is that they are handed out to reward good roleplaying. Here are some examples:

**Good Roleplaying (1)** There are times when a Star does something that has the players (or the Director) saying, "That was so cool!" He should be rewarded. Maybe he did some excellent in-character roleplaying, or came up with a brilliant way to solve a conflict that no one had thought of. A Director should toss him a story point to encourage this!

**Dramatic Irony (1-3)** When a Star does something in that is natural for their character to do, but they know will make things hard for themselves or their friends, they deserve a point.

**Completing a Personal Goal (2-4)** Whenever a Star successfully completes one of his personal goals, he should be rewarded. This might be for finding a crucial piece of information that helps them move forward in realizing a bigger goal, or defeating a hated foe.

**Completing a Party Goal (3-5 each)** When the Stars complete on of the goals for the Episode or Season, they all should be rewarded with Story Points.

## Using Story Points

There's only one thing more fun than getting story points, and that's spending them. Story Points may be used as Advances to improve a character (5 Advances to increase an Attribute by 1, 2 Advances to increase a Skill by 1, and gaining new Talents costs a different number of Advances depending on the Talent). You can use them to pull off some dangerous moves, help stay alive, or change the story. All of these possibilities are designated as optional rules, because the Director will want to decide which methods are available to the Actors.

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## *Improving Actions*

*Story points can be used to give your Star a better chance at succeeding in a conflict. By spending 5 points, a single bonus d10 is used on that roll. Only the single highest roll is kept. While this can be the difference between success or failure, remember that you could always roll a 1.*

*After a conflict has been rolled, and failed, story points can be spent to raise the result to a success. Each story point spent adds one point to the skill check.*

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Here is a conflict from the Roman Senators game as an example of Improving Actions. One Star in the game is Senator Honorius who is attempting to pass a declaration of war against Carthage. Honorius will make his case before the senate using his Influence Attribute. However, the task will be very difficult, a Difficulty Number of 20. The player who is playing as Honorius decides to improve his chances by purchasing an extra ten-sided die with 5 Story Points. He rolls 2D10 instead of 1D10 and chooses whichever die rolled the highest. Even after rolling 2d10 + his Influence Attribute + his Diplomacy Skill, Honorius only scores 19. This is a failure, and the vote narrowly rejects the declaration. All is not lost, however, because Honorius calls for a re-count. The player pays another Story Point (his sixth Story Point spent) to edit the conflict roll and bring Honorius' total up to 20. In the recount, the declaration passes.

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## *Activating Weaknesses*

*Many characters have weaknesses attached to their attributes. Weaknesses are Attribute Descriptions which hinder the character in some way. By spending one story point, you can make sure their weakness comes into play at exactly the right time for you, and the wrong time for them. When you want to activate a weakness, you get to describe to the Director how this weakness would get activated and what the results are. The Director gets the final word on how it happens or if it is relevant to the conflict at hand.*

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*The primary means that an Actor has for participating in the crafting of the story is the optional Bartering the Terms Rule. If your game uses Bartering the Terms, then you don't need Activating Weaknesses also and vice-versa. Using both optional rules is pointless complexity which adds nothing to the game.*

*Here is an example of Activating Weaknesses in action. Honorius is opposed by another Star, Senator Capitolinus – who is taking bribes from Carthage to prevent the declaration of war that Honorius wants. Honorius was tipped off before the debate that his opponent was recently embarrassed – Capitolinus accidentally he fed lions to prisoners instead of vice-versa. Capitolinus' Influence Attribute therefore has the Weakness: Lion Skeleton in Closet (-1). Honorius' player could spend 1 Story Point to activate that weakness and give himself a small edge in the debate. The Capitolinus' next conflict roll involving his Influence Attribute will be at a -1 point penalty.*

# Staying Alive

*Sometimes the damage dealt to your Star may be more than they can handle. In order to stay active in the scene, you have the option of spending story points to reduce that damage. The cost is two story points for every point of damage you want to shake off.*

*Story Points to reduce damage must be spent immediately after your Director tells you the amount of damage. In other words, you can't go back later and make it all go away. These Story Points can only bring you back up to whatever your current attribute score was immediately before taking the damage.*

*For example, Honorius is in trouble again. Capitolinus, enraged at being defeated in the senate, publicly dishonors Honorius in a vicious mud-slinging attack. He yells, "You are a traitor to Rome, a heathen to the gods, and you're mother wears gladiator boots!" This is an attack using Capitolinus' own Honor Attribute and targeting Honorius' Honor. The powerful and unexpected attack reduces Honorius' Honor to one point below zero and effectively removes him from the game. Honorius' player spends another Story Point to reduce the damage by a single point. Now Honorius has a temporary Honor Attribute of zero; he's weak and vulnerable but still in the game.*

# Being Talented

*Some talents will require the use of story points to work. Still others will give you a choice of using either story points or attribute points to use them. If the talent doesn't even mention story points, then you are out of luck. They can't be used for that talent.*

*For example, Honorius is still in trouble. His political career barely survived the last attack, so he decides that now is the best time to leave. Honorius has a Talent called Graceful Exit which allows him to remove himself from any social or political scene without being further targeted. The Talent costs one Story Point to use, so Honorius uses his last Story Point to escape. Capitolinus begins another attack but stops in mid-sentence when he realizes that Honorius has already left the senate.*

# Scene 7:

# Handling Conflict

The process of resolving a conflict is an interactive one, where the player gets a chance to influence how the game moves forward. It is handled in four simple steps that are meant to make it quick and fun. The four steps are:

1. The player states the Star's intent
2. The Director lays out the success and failure terms
3. The player and Director barter the terms
4. A roll is made

## Stating Your Intent

When a conflict has reared its ugly head, the first step is for the player to tell the Director what they're trying to accomplish and how they are trying to do that. They should make sure to tell what motivations are behind it. It is two very different tasks to dance with the Princess with the intent of impressing her father with your etiquette, or dancing with the intent to seduce her. Both situations would require a different set of skills and attributes to be used.

Skills are not tied directly to a specific Attribute. A situation often will be able to be solved using several different approaches, and the Director, paying attention to the player's description of how they want to accomplish the task, will have the flexibility to choose the best one, or to modify the player's choice.

## Success and Failure Terms

Once the players has stated intent, the Director continues by stating suggested results for both success and failure. Directors are encouraged to make failure more than "No, you don't succeed." Instead, the failure result should set the player up for more difficulties.

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### *Bartering the Terms*

*Often, what the Director states for success or failure is not what the players had in mind. In this case, they have one chance to barter for different results. After hearing that they will do only 1 point of damage to their opponent, the player might want to try going for a more difficult shot for more damage. Of course, with more damage comes a larger penalty for failure. The player is encouraged to be creative with their suggested terms for failure. A good penalty for failure is often one that will provide more roleplaying opportunities in the future, like a scar that marks him permanently. When trying for more damage, the player can not reduce the cost of failure, but might be able to change the way the failure affects them. As always, the Director has the final approval for the success and failure terms.*

*Bartering of the terms has been designated as an optional rule, but many Directors feel that it is a very important part of the C.O.R.E. system. Bartering gives C.O.R.E. much of its unique style, and it gives all of the players more investment in the story. Thus, new Directors are highly encouraged to allowing bartering in their games. Some Directors, more accustomed to rules which do not allow bartering, may be uncomfortable at first with bartering. Because the system does basically work even without bartering, this rule is classified as optional.*

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## The Roll

Once the terms have been set, the player makes a roll against the assigned Difficulty to determine their success. Conflicts are resolved by rolling 1d10 and adding the value of the relevant Skill and relevant Attribute plus any other bonuses that may be appropriate. Those other bonuses could include Attribute Strengths, Skill Strengths, or higher quality tools and materials.

This resulting number is compared to the Difficulty Number the Director has assigned the task. If it equals or is greater than the

Difficulty Number, the skill check is a success. If it is lower than the assigned Difficulty, the roll is a failure.

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## Initiative

Determining which actions happen first isn't usually important in C.O.R.E. Most actions performed by different characters occur simultaneously. If initiative does become important in a particular scene, there are a couple of different ways that the Director might determine this.

**Initiative Die Roll.** The Director could simply ask every Actor to roll a single die. The Director also rolls for the Extras. The Extras could be lumped together into a single die roll, or the Director could roll separately for each Extra. The character who receives the highest roll gets to resolve his Conflict Roll first. If two or more characters rolled the same initiative number, their actions occur simultaneously – unless the Director wants them to roll again.

**Initiative Conflict Roll.** A more detailed way of doing this would be to call for an extra Conflict Roll specifically to determine who acts first. If two gunfighters are dueling in the middle of the street, the speed of their draws can be vital to the overall story. The roll might involve a Mind Attribute + Firearms Skill + die roll, or it might be Speed Attribute + Quick Draw Skill + die roll, depending on the which attributes and skills are used in the setting.

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# Scene 8:

# Taking Damage

When a character fails a conflict, his penalty often will be to take some damage. By default, the amount of damage done is 1 point. This damage is taken from the attribute that represents the type of conflict they lost. If they were in a fight, the damage might be taken from their *Brawn* attribute. If it was a great debate in the Roman Senate, it might be *Influence* damage.

There are no direct penalties associated with reaching zero (0) in any of the attributes. Instead, they no longer have any bonuses to their die rolls. However, should a character reach 0 points in an attribute and take more damage, they are considered incapacitated.

The exact result of the incapacitation is up to the Director and will be specific to that attribute. A *Brawn* incapacitation might result in the Star falling unconscious. An *Influence* incapacitation might leave the character with no support from his usual network; perhaps even to the point they no longer trust him and he must regain that trust.

# Scene 9:

# Boosting Your Chances

Since the goal of the game is to partake in heroic, cinematic adventures, we have provided a few ways to increase your chances, outside of relying on story points.

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## No Stunt Double

Players may opt for their Stars to voluntarily take damage in exchange for a chance to lower the difficulty number of a conflict. If used, this option should be invoked during the Bartering of Terms phase of conflict resolution.

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*Basically, a Star can push oneself too far in order to accomplish a goal, and a price must be paid. In a Brawn Conflict, muscles can be pulled or over-extended. In an Influence Conflict, allies can be left feeling as if they are being overused and exploited. The Star will lose one temporary attribute point from the relevant attribute for every two points that the Difficulty Number is lowered.*

## *The Money Shot*

*When you really want to make sure that something gets done right the first time, you can increase the damage done during a conflict. This is not without risk, though.*

*Before they have made their roll, the player has the option of expending extra energy from their attribute to hedge the bet and help ensure a win. For every attribute point the player spends, they get a +2 bonus to the result. The attribute point must be from the same attribute that the roll is being made against. Whether they succeed or fail at the conflict, the attribute points are lost, just like the Star took wounds from the conflict. This is in addition to any damage the Star receives directly from the conflict.*

***This is obviously something that should not be used all of the time, as it will leave your Star weak and unable to do much more in that scene. Instead, this is something that should be saved for just the right moment. It works great when spending story points to ensure a success.***

# Stunts

*Combat in stories is filled with exciting battles as martial artists evade opponents with acrobatics among the pipes, and with swashbucklers swinging from chandeliers. Cowboys slide across the bar, cups shattering as they are shoved out of the way. To help players enter the thrill of these situations, they are rewarded for creative use of their surroundings.*

*When the Star uses his surroundings in creative and dramatic ways, or takes a risk in a fun and dramatic way that enhances the game for everyone, the Director may give up to 3 bonus points to add to their roll. This provides a gentle encouragement to players to have fun and take part in the game, which makes it a richer experience for everyone. In addition to the stated failure result, the Director should provide another failure result directly related to their use of the environment.*

## *A Helping Hand*

*When a situation allows for it, multiple characters can assist in successfully resolving a conflict. This may be everyone helping to pull on the rope and topple the ancient statue, or everyone searching through the library for one particular manuscript, when only one player is able to describe the tome needed.*

*While other characters are lending a helping hand, they add their appropriate attribute or skill score to the results. The primary character makes the roll as usual, but the total of all of the helpers' scores are added to his results. It is up to the Director to determine whether it is an attribute or skill. Only one or the other can be used to help out, not both.*

*The Helping Hand rule only applies when all participating Stars could logically be a help. For instance, trying to pry a small grate off of a wall would not work if four Stars were trying to get a grip on each corner. There simply isn't enough room. However, if they attach a rope to the grate, and everyone pulls together, then it would work. The*

# Act 3:

# Director's Notes

The Director has a hard but fun job, running the game. She creates the world, plays all of the Extras, and keeps the game interesting and exciting. C.O.R.E. has been designed to make these tasks as easy as possible. Some Directors might find that running a game with C.O.R.E. is much less work intensive than with previous rule systems they have used. That is sort of the point – the rules are no more complex or high maintenance than the Director wants them to be.

Still, few more things should be clarified.

# Scene 10:

# Rewards

## Why Characters Grow

As the game stretches into multiple scenes and episodes, the Stars can and should grow into different heroes with new skills, powers, and an ever-evolving sense of confidence. To do this, they need some way to measure and balance their growth within the framework of the game.

## Episodic Character Growth

**Episodic Salary.** *Directors are encouraged to award 1 to 5 Story Points* to every Actor during or after an episode. Actors earn these for excellent roleplaying. This is especially encouraged when a roleplaying situation might hurt the character. Another way to earn Story Points is for the Actor to create a fantastic idea or solution to a problem in the game. These bonuses are generally handed out as they occur, since this encourages more roleplaying from everyone involved.

**Story-Based Awards.** For characters to grow throughout the game, they need more than just Story Points. They should have something to show for an accomplished Episode or Story. If feasible, the end of the Episode would be a good time to give the Stars some story-based rewards like the deed to a spaceship, a new contact, another clue in the large mystery, or a large paycheck (in-game).

## Story Level Character Growth

Each story typically has a big picture which is going to take great effort and heroism on the part of the Stars. This is probably not the end of the Star's lives, however, but is the beginning of a new Story. When Actors bring their Stars to the completion of a Story, they should be rewarded in a big way.

**End-of-Story Salary.** *Roughly 10 to 20 Story Points should be awarded to each Actor at the end of each story*. The number will vary from story to story, based upon the power level of the game and how fast the Director wants her Stars to advance. (If the Extra who is the arch-villain survived the story, the Director should remember to give that character a similar reward.)

**End-of-Story-Based Awards.** There are other types of rewards which the Director might give at this point in the game. Besides Story Points, Stars might be rewarded with the deed to a new starship, a land grant, or membership within a wizard guild. The Director will use her imagination, but she should also consider the motivations of the Stars and the motivations of the Party as a whole.

# Scene 11:

# What is my Motivation?

One important element of roleplaying for Directors to remember is motivation. Motivation works on several levels simultaneously. By directing a game in towards the motives of the Stars, a Director can craft a much more satisfying story.

One of the easiest mistakes a Director can make is not preparing a motivation for the game. A Director, especially a new Director, may prepare a detailed and complex world to serve as the setting for the game. This Director might also assume that the Actors will also find these settings to be interesting. The Actors, however, are confused by not knowing exactly what it is that they are supposed to be doing. Many Actors will begin doing things like robbing random banks, picking fights, or otherwise disrupting the game world out of boredom. Allowing the Actors to create their own motivations is good, but a skilled Director will notice signs of boredom developing and have an adventure plot ready.

**Motives or Motivations.** Every story has a basic conflict. These can typically be summarized as three types: Man versus Nature, Man versus Man, or Man versus Himself. Motives can be derived from one of these three main sources, but they should also be a little more detailed. Instead of Man versus Nature, perhaps the Stars are survivors of an airplane crash over a frozen tundra and their motive is to survive the elements long enough for rescuers to arrive. Motives can also change over the course of a Series.

**Series Level Motives.** Most stories, either single episode pilots or long running series, will have a central motive that the Stars are almost always attempting to perform. This super-goal may be to protect the Earth from aliens or simply to survive while stranded in the wilderness. A Series Level Motive can unite the Stars under a single cause or doom them to forever be rivals.

**Story Level Motives.** Stars need something to do. Each Story should have a basic goal that the Stars are attempting to perform. This goal may be stealing jewels from a museum, solving a murder, or putting a band of hill giants to the sword. It is perfectly fine is the Actors choose a Story Level Motive for themselves.

**Scene Level Motives.** Actors aren't always clear on what they are supposed to be doing in a given scene. Establishing a Scene Level Motivation is a clear way to communicate what the Director expects to happen during the scene.

**Personal Level Motives.** Actors need to know why their Stars take action. It is best for the Director to allow the Actors to find their own motivations, but suggestions from the Director and discussion of these motivations also works well. The Personal Level Motive of a Star might be to gain wealth, avenge the death of a family member, win the love of the new boy in school, or anything else appropriate to the setting and the tone of the game. Personal Motives likely will change over the course of Series as Stars achieve their goals or find new priorities.

Ideally, a Personal Level Motive should be tied to the Star's Passion Backstory. When discussing a character's motive with the Actor, a Director would do well to keep this in mind. She might say, "If your Passion is being a collector, then the most obvious personal motive would be to collect something specific."

## Salary Bonuses

*A Director can award a Motivational Salary Bonus as a way of encouraging goal-motivated roleplaying. Bonuses are awarded when earned for advancing a character towards a motive. This reward is in the form of extra Story Points or Rehearsal Points (see the Director's Section in Act III for an explanation of Rehearsal Points). These points must be spent before the end of the Episode or they are lost. These bonuses are always tied to one of the three levels of motives, usually the Personal Level Motives. This will encourage the Actors to "stay in character" and*

*focus on their character's emotional needs.*

*For example, Sakura's Personal Motive is to find true love before she graduates high school. During an unrelated scene, Sakura spends her time sneaking a love letter into the book bag of the handsome new boy. She didn't have to do it. Sakura could have spent that same amount of time focusing on her history test which is really the point of the entire scene. She risks being caught and embarrassed by her history teacher, but she is working towards her motive. The Director likes the decision and awards Sakura's Actor with a single Story Point as a Salary Bonus. The Actor has until the end of the Episode to spend that point in order to Activate a Weakness, Activate a Talent, Stay Alive, or Improve an Action (see the Story Point explanation in Scene 6 of Act II for a full explanations of these options). If a Training Montage Scene occurs before the end of the Episode, Sakura can apply that single point towards improvements of her Skills , Attributes, or Talents. If Sakura doesn't spend this Bonus Story Point, she loses it at the end of the Episode.*

## Salary Advances

*If a Director wants to tightly control the number of Story Points awarded for an Episode, she may pay an Motivational Salary Advance instead of a Bonus. Advances are awarded immediately and deducted from the total number of Story Points that the character earns as Episodic Salary. The advantage for the Actor is that these Advances become available for use sooner when the Star might need them the most. In the above example, Sakura might earn a salary advance of one Story Point. She could use that Story Point in the next scene to pass her algebra test. At the end of the episode, other Stars are rewarded 3 Story Points. Because Sakura already spent one of her Story Points, she receives only 2 Story Points.*

## Rehearsal Bonuses and Advances

*Alternatively, the Director might instead decide to award Rehearsal Points instead of Story Points for motive-oriented roleplaying. Rehearsal Points are another optional system discussed later in Act III.*

# Scene 12:

# Determining Difficulty Numbers

## Opposed Conflicts

If the conflict is directly with another creature, this is called an opposed conflict. The difficulty is determined by adding the opponent's relevant Attribute + relevant Skill + 5. In the previous encounter in the coal mine, the Stars would have been comparing their totals against the Body Attribute + Combat Skill + 5 of one of those cultists. This method creates a range of difficulty numbers from 5 to 15, but opponents (both Stars and Extras) can have bonuses like Talents or Skill descriptions which raise this number even higher.

## Unopposed Conflicts

When the conflict is not directly with another person, we must use a different method. These conflicts add an amount of difficulty based upon the amount of story change a success will create. Disarming an alarm clock will be more significant than disarming a bomb even if their mechanisms are identical. This method creates a range of difficulty numbers from 5 to 20.

- Minor Changes: 5
- Significant Changes: 10
- Major Changes: 15
- Critical Changes: 20

## Scene-Based Conflicts

An even more efficient way of determining difficulty is to assign a default difficulty to every conflict roll made in the scene. Some scenes will be relatively easy with conflicts that don't burden the resources of the Stars. These difficulties begin at 5, and they apply to all characters equally. If the scene if more challenging because of bad conditions or because the Director wants to increase the challenge, the difficulty will increase. If the Director wants to make the conflict especially dramatic, the difficulty number may be raised 10 or 15. Challenging conditions can also increase the difficulty number by 1 to 5 points. Such conditions might include low light, missing tools, rushing a job, or terrible feng shui.

Remember, the Extras have to face the same difficulty number.

- Easy Scene: 5
- Low Drama Scene: up to 10
- High Drama Scene: up to 15
- Challenging Conditions: +1 to +5

There is no best method. Each Director will come to prefer one method over the others, but all three is probably be used from time to time.

# Scene 13:

# Staging of Scenes

## I've Scene It All Before

Scenes are small number of events which occur usually in the same place at nearly the same time. These events should preferably be important, entertaining, or dramatic. It isn't important the scene focus on a Star brushing his teeth in the morning. A Director should feel free to cut ahead to the good parts.

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# Encounter Blocks

Encounter Blocks work like a set of attributes describing the scene instead of a character. Another way to think of it is like this; the Encounter Block is an efficient way to describe the difficulty of a conflict. A Director is free to write out all of her traps, villains, and innocent bystanders in full detail if she so chooses. She could alternately make up all of those stats as she needs them. The Encounter Blocks are a third option. An Encounter Block is a brief description of the scene which will include any or all of the following information about the scene: the title, the stage, motivation, the duration, the difficulty, the severity, and the direction of the scene. By using Encounter Blocks, a Director can quickly prepare an original adventure with all of the elements she wants to include without forgetting them later.

**Title:** This is the name of the scene. It's a very brief description of what is supposed to happen such as "Ambush" or "Final Round of the Tournament."

**Cast:** This is a list of which Stars are participating in the scene. Not every scene involves every member of the Party. Scenes involving only one or a few Stars should be handled quickly – or else the other Actors should be given something else to do to keep them occupied.

**Extras:** This is a list of all the other characters who are participating in the scene. This list helps Directors not to forget who is on stage. If a Director wants to prepare details notes and game stats for certain extras, this list is very handy for quickly determining which characters need to be prepared before the session begins.

**Stage:** The Stage is a description of where and when the scene takes place. It is a good idea for the Director to actually read the Stage text to the Actors so that everybody shares a common vision of the scene in their own

heads.

**Motivation:** This is a Scene Level Motivation. It describes what the Director expects that the Actors will try to accomplish during this scene. This expectation might also be the instructions or order which the Stars were given by an Extra with authority over them.

**Duration:** This is a suggestion of how many actions may be performed during a scene. A duration stat is an excellent way for the Director to control the pace of the game. The number indicated as the Duration is a total number of actions for the entire Party. A very short scene might have only one action for each Actor participating in the game. A longer scene may have twenty or thirty actions divided evenly among the Actors. The Director should tell the Actors how many actions they have for the scene so that they use their actions wisely.

A Duration Rating of zero means that there are no Conflict Rolls in this scene. A scene which is supposed to be just dialog such as a mission briefing will likely have zero Duration. Actors might find scenes with Duration Ratings of zero to be restrictive.

Let's say that the scene involves a single Star hacking into an enemy's computer network. If the Director doesn't want to focus on this but instead skip ahead to gun battle in the next scene, she can limit the Actor to one or two actions which could be resolved in the Normal Conflict method. If so, the Actor might describe how his character taps away on a keyboard while slowly draining a pot of coffee, and then the Actor would make a single Conflict Roll. If the Director would rather place a little more emphasis on this scene, then the Slow Motion Conflict Method could be used instead. The Actor might have several actions, each action would be used to used as a separate Conflict Roll to penetrate a different level of security. If the Director would prefer to resolve a lot, she might call for a Time Lapse Conflict Roll. Then, the Director would call for a Time-Lapse Conflict Roll. The Actor would then describe how he spends long hours in front of the computer, drains two pots of coffee, grows some stubble on his chin, and hacks several servers in the enemy's network, all resolved in a single roll of the die.

There are two ways for a scene to end. If the Motivation was achieved before the Duration ends, the Director may end the scene early and move on to the next scene immediately. If the Duration ends while action is still unresolved, the Director could simply decide what happened and describe it for the Actors. If something particularly interesting is happening, the Director may always extend the Duration of the scene to see what happens next.

Remember, Durations are merely suggestions.

**Difficulty or Difficulty Rating:** The Difficulty Rating is a stat which indicates how hard it will be to accomplish something during the scene. Even simple Conflicts might be made difficult by the weather conditions, bad lighting, exhaustion, or skilled opponents. This number is the goal set for most conflict rolls, but there are many optional rules, Talents, and Props which may increase or decrease this number for the Actor. One method of determining a good Difficulty Rate is estimate the average result of an Opposed Conflict Roll which would be made by an Extra. The Director should often adjust this estimation by a point or two to make the scene more or less difficult. If the scenes are consistently too easy or difficult, the Actors may grow bored to frustrated, but Actors are generally quite forgiving in this respect.

**Severity or Severity Rating:** This stat describes how hazardous the scene should be for the Stars. Most scenes will have a Severity Rating of 1. This means that if a Star fails a Conflict Roll or is targeted by successful attack from another character, the Star will lose a single point of energy from the appropriate Attribute. More hazardous scenes will have Severity Ratings of 2, 3, or 4. A Severity Rating of 2 would mean that Stars suffer the loss of 2 points of energy with each failure or attack. This damage may be increased above the Severity Rating with use of certain powerful Talents or Props. Damage may also be decreased through application of certain Talents, Props, or the Staying Alive Rule. A scene with a Severity Rating of 5 is downright dangerous because it can incapacitate a Star with a single bad die roll. A fight breaking out in the tavern would likely have a Severity Rating of 1 whereas a duel to the death or closing arguments in a trial would be a 5.

Severity ratings can be used to control the tension in a scene as well as describing hazards.

**Direction:** Direction is a text block describing how the scene might be played out. The Direction is typically not read to the Actors unless the instructions in the text say otherwise. This is a good place for the Director to write notes to herself. All of the special rules for the scene, secrets, surprises, and hidden items are listed here. A Director who is

writing this part of the scene would do well to think about the different ways her Actors might act in this scene and how the outcome of each could be described. Success or failure of critical Conflict Rolls should be considered.

    **Parentheses:** The Director might anticipate one or more special situations occurring during the scene. These situations might be more or less dangerous, difficult, or time consuming than the standard conflict in the scene. The Director should include special, alternate Difficulty Ratings or Severity Ratings for the those situations. Alternate Encounter Block Stats should be listed in parentheses (like this) after the standard stat.

    For example, a single scene might involve one Star defusing a bomb while another Star defends the first in gun battle. The Severity Rating for that scene could involve more damage from the bomb exploding than the bullets. In the Encounter Block, it would look like this in this...

    **Severity:** 2 (explosion 3)

# Example Scene

In this example, the Cast is participating in an action-packed crime drama. Stars are part of a security firm called Blacksmith and Weiss. Their Motivation for the Episode is to track down the kidnapped daughter of a prominent businessman.

**Title:** Interstate Firefight

**Cast:** The Stars are four private investigators on a kidnapping case.

**Extras:** Joey Bandera and three unidentified thugs.

**Stage:** Following up on lead, the characters are trailing the suspect on the road. The road is an crowded interstate at night, so traffic can make a running battle difficult. The Stars are in a large sedan, and the Actors should decide who is driving. The Stars also have a motorcycle, and one of the Actors could be on the motorcycle alongside the car if desired. They are following Joey Bandera, a small time hood in a small-time compact car.

Trouble starts when an unmarked white van pulls alongside the sedan, and bullets start flying. The van contains four goons, one van driver, one gunner with a pistol, and two muscle heads with baseball bats. The gunner fires a random shot into the sedan which narrowly misses the driver. The two other goons begin smashing at the driver-side windows of the sedan with their bats.

**Motivation:** Repel the attack from the van while still keeping Joey Bandera from escaping.

**Duration:** 4

**Severity:** 1

**Difficulty:** 12 (traffic maneuvers 16)

**Direction:** The extras do not get their own Conflict Rolls in this scene. If the Stars lose energy from failed Conflict Rolls, this damage is explained as the minor wounds from bullets or bats. If any of the goons lose 2 or more points of Physical Energy, they will break off the attack and flee. They are cowardly, but they are unlikely to surrender unless most of them are incapacitated. Joey Bandera can be intimidated into surrendering, or he will give up if his car if rammed off the road. If a traffic accident is caused, everyone involved loses one point of Body Energy, and the vehicles are wrecked. If the players ignore Joey, he will vanish and the Stars will have to follow a different lead.

Now comes the Actors' turn. It is up to the Actors to describe how their characters will either stop the goons from shooting up their ride or how they intend to stop Joey from escaping. There are four Stars in the scene, so each Actor can have one action to declare. The Director allows them to discuss this for a minute and then asks them to declare their first actions. The order of their actions isn't important because most actions in C.O.R.E. occur simultaneously. Every Star's first action happens, then everyones second action happens, and then everyones third action happens. In this scene, the Director asks Mark what his character is doing because Mark's character is by himself on the motorcycle.

Mark: "Who are these guys? I bet they're just hired thugs. Well, I'll put a stop to this. Rachel – you take the van; I'll take care of Joey. I pull the motorcycle alongside him and point my gun in Joey's face. That should make him pull over!"

The Director then helps Mark resolve his Conflict. The Director could question Mark's ability to communicate with Rachel, but decides to let it slide. She figures that Rachel's character can probably tell what Mark's character is doing just by what can be seen. The

Director checks the Difficulty Rating of the encounter and decides that Mark's action counts as a traffic maneuver with a base difficulty of 16. She then considers how difficult this action should really be and how much impact it will have on the overall story. She decides that this is a Normal Conflict, so she leaves the Difficulty as it is.

She picks an Attribute and Skill which relate best to Mark's description of his action. In this case, Mark is both driving his motorcycle and intimidating Joey, so she could call for Mark to use his Star's Physical Attribute or Social Attribute Conflict. Among skills, she could choose between Diplomacy or Combat – or even Skullduggery because he is exploiting his knowledge of the criminal mind. She chooses Physical Attribute because Joey is attempting a show of force in his intimidation, and the Skullduggery Skill.

The Director next puts the Conflict into terms for Mark.

Director: "You're trying to weave through traffic and catch up with Joey, and then you will intimidate him. That's a lot to do, and it's a fairly difficult task at 16. On a success, Joey will wet himself, and then he will pull over immediately. On a failure, another vehicle will clip you as you pull alongside the compact. Also, you will lose one point of Physical Energy from being clipped."

Mark: "That's fine. If the bike gets clipped, it will make for some interesting acrobatics."

Mark rolls a die and adds that number to his Skullduggery Skill and the current number of energy points in his Physical Skill. The total is 16, exactly what he needs to succeed. Joey nods his head in agreement and steers off the road.

Next, the Director asks John what his character is doing. John wants to try something more daring.

John: "I want to jump from our car into the van. I'm going to take the fight to those goons."

Director: "That's cool. The default difficulty for the scene is 12. What you are describing is more difficult than most other things you could do in this situation. It won't have a huge affect on the game, but you might get a captured van. I'll increase the Difficulty by 3 points. On the other hand, I'll decrease that Difficulty by 1 point for being cinematic. So, you're Difficulty is 14. I would like you to roll a Physical + Fitness Conflict Roll."

Ralph: "I'm in the back of the sedan with John. Can I get in on this too?"

Director: "Okay, but the same roll is required from you. You can't really help each other here, so the Helping Hand Rule doesn't apply."

Ralph: "Can we roll now?"

Director: "I want the terms to be clear. With the van alongside your car, you are both throwing yourselves at the open door of their van. If you succeed, you have crossed the gap and are ready to fight. On a failure, you'll still make the leap, because I don't want anyone left behind on the road at this point in the game. If either of you rolls a failure, that Star is clinging to the side of the van and loses one point of Physical Energy from the strain. If you both fail, you're both on the side of the van, and you both take the damage."

Rachel: "Maybe I can help. I'm driving the sedan, so if I hear John saying what he's planing to do, I can make it easier for both of them. Would the Helping Hand Rule apply then?"

Director: "That sounds good to me. That would be your action for the scene, Rachel.

Rachel: "Should I make a roll?"

Director: "Not unless you want. You can just apply the number of points in your Technology Skill to their Conflict Rolls."

Rachel: "That's three extra points, guys. Remember to thank me later."

Director: "Mark, Ralph, you're characters are each making a Physical + Fitness Conflict Roll. Don't forget to add that +3 bonus from Rachel's aggressive driving. Any damage taken is still applied to you guys, not her – understood?"

Mark: "Sounds good."

Peter: "Agreed – these goons won't know what hit them."

Mark and Peter each make their Conflict Rolls. In fact, Ralph rolled a 10. Because he rolled a Critical, Ralph gets to add a second die roll to his total. Ralph is rolling so well that the Director decides Ralph was also able to also knock the pistol out of the gunner's hand. The Director describes how the pistol drops on the blacktop of the interstate speeding beneath them.

John doesn't roll as well. He rolled a 1 on his die. First, the Director declares that Mark's character missed the opening on the side of the van as it swerved but instead caught the van's sliding door. Mark got the wind knocked out of him and pulled some muscles, resulting in a loss of one Physical Energy point. Mark will have to pull himself into the van when he gets a chance and make his subsequent Conflict Rolls with one less point of Physical Energy. Because he rolled a 1, the Director decides that Mark also dropped his own weapon.

Two of the Stars are now face to face with three surprised goons. The Duration of the scene has ended, but the Director decides to extend the scene and let the Stars bust some heads. The action continues...

# Scene 14:

# Special Scenes

Not every scene needs to be same just for sameness' sake. Some of the best games have variety, different types of scenes. Certain scenes are like stock characters, tested successfully in countless stories before. Exciting chases and climatic duels are used over and over again in television, movies, and roleplaying games because they work. This section features rules and recommended methods for running different types of common scenes which Directors might want to include in their own games. Not every Actor will like every scene, so a Director should watch frustrated Actors and be prepared to introduce more variety for them as the need develops.

## In Medias Res

This Latin term refers to an out of sequence scene which is roleplayed first before events which logically lead up to it. For example, a game might start with the Stars onboard a skyship which is falling out of the air. As Extras are panicking, the Stars have only seconds to do something before the ship crashes. This will leave the Actors wondering how their characters got into that situation in the first place. Next, the Director describes how the Stars arrived at the skyport that morning and board the skyship for a relaxing cruise. Some Directors like using In Medias Res scenes to create anticipation or simply to start a game out with something exciting.

**Stage:** The staging of an In Medias Res scene should be very clear, moreso than most any other type of scene. The Actors are relying entirely upon the Director's description of the scene to understand what is happening around them. The Director does not, however, need to explain why the actors are there.

**Motivation:** A clear motive might be helpful in this situation. Motives help players, especially new players, to deal with new situations and not be overwhelmed by too many choices.

**Duration:** In Medias Res scenes tend to work best when they are kept short. A long In Medias Res scene or a series of these scenes will make

**Severity:** usually 1

**Difficulty:** any number

**Direction:** In Medias Res scenes should be clearly structured beforehand. A Director should give the Actors just enough drama to peak their interests. It's easy to trap oneself with In Medias Res and foreshadowing, so Directors shouldn't feel entirely compelled to stick to whatever action was established in an In Medias Res scene.

## Flashbacks

Like In Medias Res, a flashback is an out-of-sequence scene. Any even which happened prior to the previous scene can be explored in a flashback. The Director can use Flashback Scenes to fill in gaps in the story, provide clues, or explore a Star's background. Too many flashbacks can cause confusion, so Directors should probably limit this type of scene to once or twice per session.

**Title:** The best and clearest format would be "Flashback to..."

**Cast:** All of the Stars may be featured in a Flashback Scene, but more traditionally, the scene will involve a single Star.

**Stage:** The Stage in a Flashback scene can be anywhere that the Stars might have visited in the past. The Stage might even be the place that the Stars are visiting in the current time of story. A clever Director could use Flashback Scenes to drop clues about what the Stars might do next. The scene might begin with the Director saying, "This room looks very familiar to you. You think you've scene it before. You remember back to when you were child..."

A similar use of a Flashback Scene would be to take the Stars back to a mission briefing. This method would allow the Director to give clues and instructions right before the Actors need this information.

**Motivation:** The motive of the Actors in a Flashback Scene is to find or create a missing piece piece of the story.

**Direction:** Some Directors are afraid to use Flashbacks because they have the potential for causing continuity errors. The truth is that most Actors will try to help the Director avoid continuity errors instead of creating them. Even if a continuity error does occur, it isn't that much of a problem. When was the last time you saw a movie which *did not* have a hole in the plot?

# Mission Briefings

A Mission Briefing is a scene in which clear instructions are laid out for the Stars. This can be done at the beginning of a session or later as a Flashback Scene.

**Cast:** All of the Stars should preferably be involved in a Mission Briefing.

**Extra:** At least one other character should be present to provide the information to the Stars and answer their questions. Preferably, the Extra should be someone reliable enough that the Stars feel they can trust the information being given to them.

**Stage:** A Mission Briefing should ideally take place in some quiet room where nothing else is happening to distract the Stars (nor the Actors) from the information being given.

**Duration:** 0. The point of a mission briefing is to provide information. Actors may ask all of the questions they like (or until the Extra looses patience). There isn't usually a need for the Actors to declare any action nor make any conflict rolls. Those rolls are unneeded and would probably just slow down the game.

**Motivation:** A Director would do explain that the entire purpose of this scene is to give the Stars access to information. They are allowed to ask questions. If the Actors don't want the information, then the scene can end early. A Director can simply let them struggle through a mission without the knowledge they need to succeed. The Mission Briefing can be revisited later in a Flashback Scene.

**Direction:** The Extra in this scene is knowledgeable That doesn't mean he must be a computer spitting out data with no personal motivations and no personality. A memorable character will help the scene (and that vital information) be memorable to the Actors.

# Training Montages

Training Montages are an excellent way for the Actors to participating deeply in development of the story. Training Montages create the illusion of large amounts of time passing by portraying samples of events which take place during that time. Training Montages can be requested by the Director whenever an Actor wants his Star to improve an Attribute or Skill or develop a new Talent.

**Cast:** Usually this type of scene will feature just one Star at a time, but a number of Stars could train together if working towards the same goal.

**Duration:** 0. This type of scene isn't about chance but narration. No conflict rolls are needed.

**Motivation:** The Actor should describe how his character improves over time through a series of training exercises.

**Direction:** The Director should probably just let the Actors have free reign. Even if the Actor narrates something goofy or disturbing which disrupts the tone of the game, that's okay. The training montage need not have any effect on the rest of the game except that the Star's character sheet improves somewhere. Yes, the Director can feel free to ignore everything that the Actor said like it never happened and just give the stat boost. More often than not, the Actor will surprise the Director by providing her with something original or entertaining which enhances the story. Actors need challenge to grow as storytellers just like their characters need challenge rolls to advance.

# Healing Scenes

Healing Scenes work similarly to Training Montages. Both types of scenes focus on narration rather than dice rolling and give the Actors a lot of room to tweak the story as they see fit. Healing Scenes are a chance for Stars to catch their collective breath, gather their wits, or sew their own wounds shut.

**Cast:** Any character who has spent or otherwise lost Attribute Energy gets a chance to recharge.

**Duration:** 0. No conflict rolls are made during Healing Scenes. The time in-game will depend on the situation. In a Sports Drama,

the Healing Scene might be a time-out lasting five minutes. After an epic superhero battle, a healing scene might last for months during which the hero lapses into a coma.

**Motivation:** Any Actor participating in a Healing Scene should describe how his character regains the type of energy lost. A character regaining Physical Energy after a prize fight might describe how he is icing down his tired and bruised muscles. A martial artist might regain Chi Energy by finding a quiet spot and meditating for an hour. A wizard might regain a point of Magic Energy by taking a power nap or simply stopping for a minute to reorganize his bag full of scrolls.

**Direction:** The Director should probably let the Actors have a lot freedom to decide how their characters recover. The only consideration is that time spent should have something to do with the Attribute being replenished. At the end of the Healing Scene, each participating Star will gain back one point of energy to any attribute. If players ask for too many Healing Scenes, the Director can simply give them an in-game time limit by which they must complete episode's adventure.

# Chase Scenes

Few events can add action and suspense to a story as quickly or easily as a high speed chase. Any time that a Star pursues some other character – or is being pursued – the opportunity for a chase scene develops.

**Extras:** The Stars will need someone to chase or someone to chase them.

**Duration:** 3 to 5 actions per Actor are recommended. If a Chase Scene is too short, it won't give the pursuer a chance to catch up that character starts to fall behind. If a Chase Scene is too long, it begins to drag and disrupts the pace of the game.

**Motivation:** The Stars are trying to escape – or pursue someone who is trying to escape.

**Direction:** Consider whether or not the Party is moving together. If the Party is moving together, they should make a combined as per the Helping Hand Rule and make a single Pursuit Roll. If the Party is in separate vehicles or running separately, the Director might call for separate Pursuit Rolls. There is a chance that one Star will fall behind.

Dangerous high speed stunts should be emphasized. Alternatively, a chase scene could be slow moving is the pursuer is trying to shadow another character without being noticed. Either way, the scene works the same way mechanically.

The pursued character makes a Pursuit Roll, an extra conflict roll at the beginning of each turn which does not count against the actions in his Duration. The roll is an attempt to gain distance between himself and the pursuer. The pursuer also makes a Pursuit Roll. If everyone succeeds this extra conflict roll (or if everyone fails), the characters match pace with each other.

If the pursued character wins and the pursuer fails, the pursued character beings to pull away. The pursuer's next conflict roll is made at a +1 difficulty. If the pursued character pulls farther away, the penalty becomes +2 difficulty. If the pursued character pulls away three times, the scene ends and that character escapes.

If the pursuer succeeds in a Pursuit Roll and the pursued character fails, the pursuer will get closer. If the pursuer gains ground three times, the pursuer will catch the target.

# Duels

Winner takes all – that is the idea behind a duels. Duels can be physical contests with swords or pistols, or a duel can take place at a card table or on a tennis court. Closing arguments in a trail can be ran as a Duel Scene also. Duels should always be climatic and dramatic.

**Cast and Extras:** Either two Stars are needed or else a Star and some Extra to fight are needed. Duels are assumed to take place between only two characters. Duels tend to occur according to strict rules of procedure, so the Director may want to include a referee as an extra.

**Duration:** As long as it takes.

**Motivation:** Each character wants to knock down the other. The motivation behind a duel is usually to kill, so an Actor shouldn't hesitate to suggest a death option when negotiating terms with the Director.

**Severity:** The Severity Rating will depend on the type of duel being performed. A European Fencing duel will involve two characters wearing each other down with slashes and cuts before one sees an opening to deliver a finishing blow (Severity of 1 or 2). A Japanese Samurai duel is usually determined with a single blow (Severity of 4 or 5).

**Direction:** It's a good idea to start each duel with an extra conflict roll to determine initiative. Most actions in C.O.R.E. take place simultaneously, but duels are an exception.

Duels are always slow-motion events. Every parry, dodge, and counter-attack is resolved with a separate conflict roll. Minor details like distracting noises or the sun in a character's eyes will affect the difficulty of each conflict roll. High difficulties force the Actors to resort to drastic negotiations in order to achieve a success.

When one of the duelists drops to zero energy in the relevant attribute, that character is incapacitated. Death doesn't occur automatically in C.O.R.E. but it may be included as an optional effect when negotiating the terms of a conflict roll.

# Song and Dance Numbers

Even if your story is not a musical, an occasional song can lift the mood of a game which is getting too serious or melancholy.

**Title:** The title of this scene should serve as the title of the song. This is important for establishing the tone of the song.

**Cast and Extras:** A solo performance can tell the other members of the Cast a lot about a particular Star's feelings and motivations. Even solos and duets, however, most often turn in to a large cast scenes before the end of the song. Typically, the bigger is better for casts in song and dance scenes. After all, dancers and back-up singers in this game are free, so hire as many as you like.

**Duration:** 4 to 6 actions for the entire Party, each action will represent a different stanza.

**Motivation:** A Song and Dance number is an opportunity to directly announce a Star's inner thoughts or feelings. If an Actor doesn't want to express anything, than that Star simply joins in singing the chorus and doesn't perform a stanza. Song and dance numbers in C.O.R.E. are usually silly, goofy, zany comic relief moments.

**Severity:** 0.

**Direction:** The concept of roleplaying a song and dance number is a little odd. Very few if any Actors will want to actually perform at the gaming table, and this isn't required nor even encouraged. Instead, song and dances are simulated.

Songs are simulated by allowing the Actors to compose their own lyrics. Four to eight lines of all that is needed. These lyrics don't even need to rhyme. In turn, each Actor reads his lyrics aloud.

Dances are simulated by narration. The Actors are allowed to describe how their Stars dance around the Set. Directors, do not let your Actors actually dance. They will break something.

Rewards for Song and Dance scenes are a little different. Instead of regular Experience Points, Directors should award Rehearsal Points. See the explanation of Rehearsal Points later in this document.

# Wrap Parties

**Following a dramatic episode or series, the Actors should have a chance to celebrate completion of their story. Directors might let them have a little fun with their Stars in-character but not in-story.**

**Cast and Extras: All of the Stars should be present along with any Extras which the Director wants to include. Even dead characters and arch-enemies are welcome. Everyone at the Wrap Party gets along (more or less) regardless of what they did to each other on Set.**

**Duration: The Director might limit a particularly goofy Actor to no more than 10 actions or else the scene will never end.**

**Motivation:** The Actors and Director are trying to make themselves and each other laugh. Is there something that you wanted a character to say or do for the entire game, but it never seemed appropriate? This is the time to do it. Let the paladin get drunk and deliver a pick-up line to the princess. Let the elf declare his love for the dwarf. If the hero spent an entire story gaining the hammer of Thor, let him use it to crack walnuts.

**Severity and Difficulty:** 0

**Direction:** No rewards are given for actions performed during a Wrap Party. The party itself is reward enough.

# Blooper Reels

Here is an alternative to Wrap Parties. A Director with a particularly funny Cast might end the an episode or a series with a collection of bloopers. It is assumed that what happened at the table is what was actually seen on screen in the make-believe movie that the Cast and Director are creating. What if those events didn't work right on the first try? A Cast could try re-role-playing memorable lines and conflict rolls. This time through, they make the outcomes different. Maybe a prop weapon fell apart during the climatic duel.

**Duration: The Director might limit a particularly goofy Actor to no more than 10 actions or else the scene will never end.**

**Motivation:** As with the Wrap Party, the Actors and Director are trying to make themselves and each other laugh. Maybe Capitolius the Roman Senator mispronounced the city of Carthage as the city of Cartilage and all of the other Senators shouted, "Ewwww!" Nothing which happens in this scene has any effect on the story, so don't worry about it.

**Severity and Difficulty:** 0

**Direction:** No rewards are given for actions performed during a Blooper Reel. The scene itself is reward enough.

# Scene 15:

# Stories and Series

## Content Ratings

In C.O.R.E., a ratings system is used to categorize the content of games. A single story – be it a single episode or multiple episodes – should have a consistent rating. A series typically also have a consistent rating from beginning to end, but a Director might change the rating over time to reflect an evolving tone.

This is the same ratings system which is used by movies, so nearly everyone is already familiar with it. Games which are G-rated will have almost no violence or other sensitive themes. Games which are R-rated can be expected to contain violence, adult situations, foul languages, and-or moderate sexual content. Giving the game a rating will allow everyone involved to know what is expected and what is not allowed at the gaming table.

Here is a list of different ratings for movies (and thus also games of C.O.R.E.). Each label ais followed by a description of what the term represents. They are listed from the most squeaky clean to the most potentially offensive.

**B:** For Bollywood; movies from India are perhaps the cleanest ever made. They rarely contain any violence or hint of violence and never any sexual content. Actors don't even kiss in Bollywood movies. Typically, an actor and actress will draw close as they are seemingly about to kiss, but then at the last moment, they instead break into a song and dance routine.

**G:** For General audience; movies which are unlikely to offend anyone usually carry this rating. Characters might face danger, but no one ever dies unless it's a movie about cute ghosts in the first place. The language in G-rated movies is exceptionally clean, and there is no violence.

**PG:** For Parent-Guidance suggested; PG-rated movies are nearly identical to G-rated movies. The language is clean, most adult situations are left out of the script, and violence occurs in limited amounts. What violence does exist is not graphic. Drug use is absent from PG-rated movies.

**PG-13:** For Parental Guidance suggested, restricted to audiences aged 13 and up; language is mostly clean, adult situations are discussed but not always shown, and violence is usually not graphic. Sexual content may be also be discussed but not portrayed. Brief

nudity may occur in PG-13-rated materials. References to illegal drugs or drug use may be portrayed also. Even tobacco use can result in a movie's rating changing from PG to PG-13.

**R:** For Restricted; this ratings is a catch-all category for most adult movies. The language can be filthy, adult situations like drug use are commonly central themes. Violence including bloodletting and killing may be plentiful. Sexual content is portrayed only briefly and in limited ways.

**NC-17:** For No Children, 17 and under admitted; this recently developed rating labels movies which are more intense in some way than the standard R-rated movie. Sexual content may be less restricted in NC-17 movies, or violence can be downright grisly.

**M, H, and X:** For Mature, Hentai, and Sexual: All three of these different ratings basically mean the same thing – anything goes. American movies with extreme content tend to get the M-rating whereas the Japanese use the term "hentai" which means "dirty." X was originally a designation for movies whose content was strictly limited to adults, but it has become a designation recognized around the world for pornography. Pornographers themselves have created the XXX-rating to differentiate their own work from certain art-house movies which earned X-ratings. In X and XXX-rated movies, graphic sexual content is not only allowed but expected.

# Plotting a Story

Stories can be tricky. No matter how well prepared a story might be, the Director will often need to change it when actually playing the game. The pacing of the story might be too fast or too slow. The Cast may need some extra hints; or the Cast may take the story in a completely different direction than how she intended.

Nonetheless, plotting a story can be fun and very helpful. Beginning Directors tend to work best with adventures called "modules" which were prepared by a more experienced gamer. Very soon, every Director will want to compose an original story, created specifically for her Cast. "Plotting" is the term we use for how a Director lays out the scenes to form a episode. It can also refer to how a Director plans stories for a series.

Episodes work best following the literature format which has worked for fiction for thousands of years: a beginning, a middle, and an end. This format is also called the Three Act Play.

If each story has a beginning, then the Cast has a starting point from which they will understand their roles in the story. If a setting is new to the Cast, a clear beginning is critical to their enjoyment of the game. In Medias Res and Mission Briefing Scenes work well in the beginning.

The middle is a chance for the story to advance and the characters to develop. Chase scenes, healing scenes, and training montages work well in the middle. The middle is also a good place for a plot twist.

The end is a climax. The climax should bring resolution to the story, win or lose. When an adventure is at a final, dramatic scene, a Director can play it up for all it is worth. The best Director will create tension and doubt for the Actors. She will make them sweat and get on the edge of seats (or out of their seats) the way we might except at the end of an exciting movie. A Director can strive to not underplay the end and make her Stars work for their victory. Director tricks include magnifying the Stars' actions as though it were their last. Just generally making a big deal out of everything.

After the climax, at least one more scene is needed to tie up loose ends and allow the Stars to recover and reflect on their journey. Some writers like to include a fourth act in their stories, a chance to thoroughly explore through several scenes what happens to all of the characters after an epic climax.

Series also work well in the Three Act Format. The first episode of a series exists solely to introduce the Star (or the Party of Stars) and the Set. A conflict which is the plot for the series is introduced in the first or second episode. The Star makes gradual progress towards a final victory through the middle of the series, from the second episode onward. Sometimes the Star fails and looses progress toward that final victory. The end comes in one or two dramatic episodes where the stakes are higher and the action is a little more intense than ever before. After the climax, a scene or an entire episode may be spent as falling action in which the Actors see the results of their final victory or final defeat.

# Scene 16:

# Rehearsal Points

## What are Rehearsal Points?

Here is a different take on experience. If an Actor writes out an interesting and thorough backstory, that Actor should be rewarded somehow. If an Actor provides theme music or artwork – or even pizza, that Actor should probably be recognized for going above and beyond the call of duty. Any Actor who contributes something useful to the gaming experience can be rewarded with a specific type of experience called Rehearsal Points.

Some gamers feels that characters should never be rewarded for events which occur outside of the Set (outside of the game). There is a certain wisdom to this position. That is the reason why Rehearsal Points work differently than Story Points.

Rehearsal Points may also be rewarded for other tasks which take place both in and outside of the game. A funny song composed for a Song and Dance Scene will earn Rehearsal Points. A reward for exceptional roleplaying of character defects could be Rehearsal Points instead of Story Points – because it was the Actor who excelled and not his Star.

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### *So What Good are Rehearsal Points?*

*That would depend on the game. Each Set will have a different way to spend Rehearsal Points. Here is a good guideline: Rehearsal Points may not be used to improve a character permanently, but they may be used to improve a character's performance temporarily by Improving Actions, Staying Alive, Activating Weaknesses, or Being Talented. These options were discussed in detail back in Scene 6 of Act II.*

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# Scene 17:

# Tones and Themes

**Before you ever pick a die to roll, you should decide what type of game you want to play. It would be best if you are Actors and Directors working together to decide this, but a Director could do this by herself if she is in a situation where she doesn't have access to the Actors – such as if she is preparing for a game for a convention. When creating an original setting, choosing tomes and themes is even more important.**

Choosing a tone is a clear indication of what type of game will be played. Is your game dark and tragic, light-hearted and romantic, or weird and goofy? Creators should choose three adjectives which describe setting as you see it. One or two specific terms are best, because to give everyone else a clearer understanding of the type of games you expect to see played in this setting. Broad terms are okay also, because you don't want to narrowly define the setting is such a way that restricts creative freedom.

**Tone:** <u>adventurous</u>, <u>noble</u>, and <u>epic</u>

**or Tone: <u>mysterious</u>, <u>morally gray</u>, and <u>street level</u>**

A theme is more goal oriented than descriptive. What types of conflicts will be occurring in this game? That type of theme might be "Man vs. Nature" or "Gladiatorial Combat." What types of goals will the Stars have to achieve? That type of theme might be "Survival" or "Exploration." What social issues will be a factor during your game? That type of theme might be "Slavery" or "Redemption." Creators should choose two descriptions for each game.

**Theme:** <u>sex</u> and <u>violence</u>

or **Theme:** <u>conspiracy</u> and <u>justice</u>

Taken together, a tone and theme should provide a clear vision of adventures to come. The previously mentioned game about Roman Senators might be described this way...

**Tone:** <u>classical</u>, <u>Machiavellian</u>, and <u>elitist</u>

**Theme:** <u>politics</u> and <u>patriotism</u>

# Scene 18:

# General Advice for Directors

When telling a story, try and let your Actors get involved the way they want to be involved. Don't assume that they want to be the heroes. They might be more happy as sidekicks or villains.

Let them discover things in there own time. Don't force things on then. If the Actors are lost or bored, that is the time to start forcing a plot onto them.

If your players are having fun, let them have it. Even it they are not following the story or have decided they want to pursue your side plot, let them. There is a considerable amount of communal wisdom in every gaming group which you can tap.

Try using materials creatively. A great Director once created the front page of a Victorian newspaper. It had news articles which described events that involved the Stars. The Actors loved it. It also had stories that where going on at the same time that the players new about, so it made the game world see alive.

Here are some thoughts regarding on-going campaigns and adventures in the same world. Try and keep things consistent. Make the players apart of your world. Try and give your players something fresh each game session. That doesn't mean weird or completely different, but do give them different challenges and different adventure hooks.

# Act 4:

# The Stage

It's time for you to build your Stage.

The Stage is another term for the setting. It's the time and the place where the events of a game occur. That's a setting in the most simple terms, and that is really all you need to create a Stage for a game of C.O.R.E.; just a concept of a time and a place. It Stage could be as simple as "On my street, around noon." It could be "In Sherwood Forest, during the reign of Prince John." It could be "A long, long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away." The more specific the time and place, the clearer the setting will be.

A Stage can also be a broader term determining what might be happening in the game. What special or optional rules will the game use? More about rule choices will be discussed below in the instructions for creating a Screenplay Book.

# Scene 19:

# Equipment and Props

## Mundane Equipment

    C.O.R.E. handles equipment a little differently than most game systems. There are no detailed equipment lists which the player is forced to browse while writing down each item, tallying the cost, and calculating the weight. (...unless you want to do that; for some Actors, shopping is the favorite part of roleplaying.) Because the damage and difficulty are often characteristics of a scene, the damage done with most weapons in C.O.R.E. is going to be the same. One tool works as well as most others. Haggling with a merchant is a conflict roll rather than a function of the number of coins. Actors should write down only the most important items which they possess. Those items are usually only important to the story. Those unimportant items are mundane equipment. Mundane equipment can still be powerful like a great sword, super-computer, machine gun, or shuttlecraft – but only if those items are common to the setting and relatively unimportant.

    For example, Peter the Knight owns a lot of equipment. He may have several horses, but he only rides his dappled-gray stallion into battle. He may have a collection of military weapons, but he prizes the long sword with the brass pommel which he inherited from his father. The "dappled-gray stallion" and "father's long sword with brass pommel" are listed on Peter's character sheet because they help define the image of the character, imply history, and have a sentimental value to the character. A Director can encourage this type of treasure collection by offering specific and memorable items like this as rewards and winnings in the game.

    Some equipment is not mundane. Certain items have extra abilities which make them stand out among the mundane equipment. Special equipment comes in two forms, Power Props and Focus Props. Not every game will feature one or both types of special equipment. Focus Props (also called Focus Items in C.O.R.E. Version 1) enhance the abilities of the character who uses them whereas Power Props have their own abilities. The Director should decide which if either type of equipment have a place in her campaign.

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## *Power Props*

    *Power Props are items which have their own Talents. A magic hammer may have the Talent of Knock-back. A custom-built revolver which uses a larger caliber of bullet than most might also have the Talent of Knock-back. A Gatling Gun, if it is the only one in the campaign, might have the Talent of Multiple Actions so to designate it as more dangerous than standard guns. It is important to remember that the special abilities of Props is not always a function of an item being magical.*

    *Here is an example of a Power Prop: a legendary warhorse. Alexander the Great had Bucephalus. El Cid had Bevieca. Both of these horses were braver, more easy to command, and more powerful than the average horse or even average warhorse. A legendary warhorse is a Power Prop which has the following abilities: Talent of Knock-back, Talent of Mighty Blow, and grants +2 to Riding rolls.*

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| *Props with Internal Power* | *Props with External Power* | *Props with Unlimited Power* |
|---|---|---|
| | *Other Props require that* | *Some Props don't* |

By their nature or design, some props provide their own energy for their Talents. The number of times which this can be done per scene is considered a charge. A six-shot revolver would have six charges. Many Props have only a single charge. The conditions for regenerating those charges will vary from one Prop to another, but typically they will recharge whenever a healing scene occurs.

the user spend his own Attribute Energy to power the Talents.

For example, a vampire with a Blood Attribute of 4 has gained a book of blood magic called the "Vitaenomicon." The Director decides that spells within the tome are considered Talents. The book requires the vampire to use some of her own blood to release this magic. She wants to cast a spell which will protect her from sunlight for a time, but the cost of her own precious blood is high, 3 points of Blood Energy. The Vitaenomicon is a Prop with External Power that requires the user to spend energy from her Blood Attribute to enact.

require any Attribute Energy be spent to use their Talents.

A warhorse like Bevieca doesn't need El Cid to spend his own attribute energy to perform a Mighty Blow. Bevieca will gladly stop an enemy footsoldier with his hoof while El Cid is preoccupied with some other knight. These powerful attacks are an effect of Bevieca's mass and strength. Bevieca could probably keep stomping footsoldiers all day long if El Cid would allow him to do it. Bevieca is a Prop with unlimited power.

## Focus Props

A Focus Prop is a second type of Prop which enhances Talent. For the bonus to be gained, the user must work through the Focus Item. King Arthur wants to use his Talent of Inspiration to rally his knights before a major battle; his sword Excalibur enhances King Arthur's ability but only when he holds the sword above his head as a symbol of his divine authority. A witch's crystal ball might have no powers itself, but it helps the witch focus her own magic so that she can see other places through it. A spy with a credit card that has unlimited funds would get a bonus when using that card to help him bride an informant. A mechanic's lucky wrench might have no power whenever he loans it to anyone else. In the mechanic's own hands, he believes it to be lucky and thus gains a bonus to all of his conflict rolls using his Talent of Jury-Rigging.

Focus Props are always connected to a specific Talent. The bonus gained by a Focus Prop will vary depending upon quality and power of the item. Each Prop Item will offer a bonus ranging from +1 to +3 to conflict rolls.

# Equipment Quality

Another way to categorize equipment is by its quality. Quality equipment can offer a bonus or a penalty to conflict rolls when using this equipment. The four levels of quality are poor, normal, excellent, and masterwork. Creating excellent or masterwork items usually requires a character to have a special Talent for it.

**Poor Quality:** -1 penalty to all conflict rolls when using this equipment.

**Normal Quality:** No penalty nor bonus is given. The vast majority of equipment is normal.

**Excellent Quality:** +1 bonus to all conflict rolls when using this equipment.

**Master Quality or Masterwork:** +2 bonus to all conflict rolls when using this equipment.

# Armor

An Armor Rule don't appear in most C.O.R.E. games. This is done on purpose to streamline and simplify the system as much is feasible. Many settings wouldn't want an armor system. In super-hero games, spy thrillers, and supernatural horror games; armor is really encountered, and it is best handled through the standard rules by raising the difficulty number to injure another player by a single point (or two for heavy armor). Raising a difficulty number is useful but far from the best choice in a setting where armor is common and a major factor in tactics. Armor-common settings require a more robust rule for stimulating the effectiveness of armor (or better armor than the other guy has) on conflicts, both combat conflicts and social conflicts where the threat of combat is present.

Armor is considered be a Prop with the Talent of Damage Reduction. More specifically, It is a Power Prop with unlimited power.

Armor, like most equipment, can be of differing quality; normal, excellent, or master quality. Wearing no armor or poor armor at all grants no damage reduction. Wearing regular armor would grant a single point of damage reduction per scene. Wearing excellent armor would grant two points of damage reduction per scene. Wearing master-quality armor would grant three points of damage reduction per scene.

There are some limitations. The damage reduction of armor merely prevents the damage the same attribute as the armor type. Armor is overwhelmingly Physical, so it prevents the loss of Physical Energy. Physical armor does nothing to prevent Mental, Social, nor damage to any other attribute.

Second, heavy armor can slow down a character. Wearing armor can also can a character to become exhausted more quickly. These complications can lead to Directors increasing the difficulty of relevant conflict rolls.

Remember that the point of the three types of armor is their relative effectiveness. What may be master-quality armor in one setting would only be regular armor in another setting. In a Dark Age drama, a knight's chain mail might be his normal armor, but his heavy plates which he wears to jousting tournaments are excellent armor. If that same knight were to be thrown backward through time into the Copper Age, even his steel chain mail would be a master quality armor compared to the primitive leather and copper armor of the natives. If that same knight is thrown through time again into a Space Opera, even his heavy steel plate armor will be considered merely normal armor

*(if that) when facing a high-powered blaster.*

## The Final Word on Equipment

As a Director, the game is no more or less complex than you want it to be. You can have laser swords or magic broom sticks in your game without using any of the above optional rules. If you desire a game with more emphasis on equipment, you can run a game about tomb raiding archeologists who hunt for Masterwork Focus-Power Props of unlimited power for dozens of Talents each – or not. Even if you start a campaign using optional rules or not, you may drop them later or introduce them as the pace of the game requires. It's all about direction.

# Scene 20:

# Special Effects

Related to the idea of tone and theme are special effects. These are the extraordinary powers and abilities which are available to characters during a game. Any type of magic system or advanced technology which justifies these abilities would be a special effect.

Some fantasy special effects include: Divine Magic, Scholarly Magic, Sacred Geometry, Alchemy, Werewolves, and Talking Animals.

Some science fiction special effects include: Hyperspace Engines, Laser Guns, Jet Packs, Giant Robots, Genetic Engineering, Nano-Machines, and Aliens.

You should create a short list of all the special effects which might occur on your Stage. A short list will prevent your Stage from becoming overburdened and confusing with different effects.

Next, consider how Stars and Extras will use these special effects. Are the Stars running from monsters or are they supposed to be the monsters? Will mystic martial art moves be expressed as separate Talents which cost Energy to use, or will those mystic martial art moves be rounded together into a single Martial Arts Skill which requires no energy to use?

Finally, consider how much is known about these special effects by the characters. Maybe the Divine Magic considered public knowledge and butchers use that magic to sharpen their knives. Is the existence of the special effects a closely guarded secret by an organization of a few Extras? Are the Stars the only characters on the Stage who know about the Special Effects? Is one Special Effect more secret than the others?

# Scene 21:

# Creating a Screenplay

Do you want to create a new setting for C.O.R.E.? That's great! It's easy to create a Screenplay with everything that another Director would need. You can share your settings with others freely due to the Creative Commons License attached at the end of this document.

The creation of an entire new setting can be a daunting task. It really isn't that difficult. Just answer a few simple questions in this guide and fill in a few details. The setting is only as complex or as simple as you prefer it. Each of these questions are listed individually. Then, a guide sheet has been included for easy print containing all of these questions.

**What is the name of your Stage?**

**What is your inspiration?** Is the screenplay based upon any particular novel, movie, or comic? If not, what fictional works or historic periods are similar to the way you envision this setting?

**What are the Tones and Theme?**

**Who are the Stars?**

**Who are the Extras?**

**Which Special Effects?** What elements are at work in this setting which give some characters unusual abilities above those of other characters?

**What things might the Actors want to do?** Are you expecting the stars to fight crime, explore dungeons, or become famous musicians?

**Which Attributes & Skills will you use?** Each attribute should be ideally be something that an Actor could conceivably want to use in a Conflict Roll and something which can be diminished if that roll fails. You can always go back to the old standard list of attributes from C.O.R.E. Version 1: Physical, Mental, Social, & Spiritual.

Skills are a little more open to preference than attributes. It doesn't matter how many skills you pick. Some Directors find that six seems to be a good number of skills for simple games and no more than twelve skills for complex games. The skills should be broad enough that when mixed with attributes, they should cover just about every obvious Conflict Roll. If a particular conflict will be used often, consider splitting that conflict by creating two or more similar skills. For example, instead of just using a Combat Skill; try using Ranged Combat and Melee Combat Skills, or Armed Combat and Unarmed Combat Skills. You can always go back to the old standards still fall back on the list of skills from C.O.R.E. Version 1: Everyman, Combat, Fitness, Nature, Negotiation, Skullduggery, Supernatural, and Technology.

**Which Talents will you use?** Not every Stage needs Talents. Often, the attributes and skills of characters are all that they need. If you do decide to use Talents, consider whether you want to use a short list of broad Talents (like Skill Mastery and Prop Creation) or a long list of specific Talents (like X-Ray Vision Super Power or Fireball Magic Spell). Talents which draw upon all four of the attributes are best for balance.

Decide what cost needs to be paid to use these abilities. If the cost is attribute energy or Story Points,these abilities should be Talents. If there is no cost to use, then these abilities may be represented by either Talents with no Use Cost – or as Skills which never have a use cost. Keep in mind that your list is a set of guidelines and not meant to be a complete list. Actors will have their own ideas to add.

**Will Attribute or Skill Descriptions be used?** Strengths and weaknesses are a good way add complexity to a game without deviating from the basic mechanic of the Conflict Roll. Will you use Strengths and Weaknesses to modify attributes or skills or both? Will you be using the optional Activate Weaknesses Rule? If so, you will be giving the Actors more opportunity to take active rolls in the story crafting process?

**Will you use Props?** If so, what type of Props will they be, Powered or Focus?

**Which Optional Rules will you use?** A list of all the optional rules from this document will be on the guidesheet below. Of course, you are allowed and encouraged to create your own optional rules. Also, there are several sets of optional rules at the C.O.R.E. Wiki which are designed as broad systems for topics like martial arts or magic casting.

**What are your Backstory Choices?** The four phases are Childhood, Education, Passion, and Career. That standard system is for humans to have one point in each attribute before creating backstories, and then

attribute points and skill points are added for each of the four backstory element chosen from the four phases. Don't bother creating backstory choices for character concepts that you don't expect to be used in your game.

Making alterations is to the four phases is allowed. For example, maybe aliens have 2 starting points in a certain attribute and 0 in another. You may want to change one of the phases of backstories, picking an animal species instead of a Career. So a game about mythical talking animals might be Childhood + Education + Passion + Species.

**Create Que Cards for your Actors.** Que Cards are guidesheets which help your Actors through the process of character creation. These should include all of their choices during character creation. If you have to read or explain their list of choices, decisions will be much more difficult and character creation will take many times longer. Actors like to see their choices instead of hearing them. It might also be a good idea to include a list of optional rules for your setting so that every Actor has a reference of all their options when making a conflict roll.

Here is an example of a very simple Screenplay.

**What is the name of your Stage?** _The Jane Austin Roleplaying Game_

**What is your inspiration?** _Pride & Prejudice_

**What are the Tone and Theme?**
Tone: Clever, Dramatic, and Romantic
Theme: Courtship and Social Status

**Who are the Stars?** Young, single women and men

**Who are the Extras?** Parents and rival suitors

**Which Special Effects?** None

**What things might the Actors want to do?** Flirt, dance, and conspire

**Which Attributes?** Beauty, Brains, Reputation, and Wealth

**Which Skills?** Academics, Riding, Dancing, Gossip, and Perception

**Which Talents?** Contacts, Evaluate, Skill Mastery, and Graceful Exit

**Will you use Attribute or Skill Descriptions?** Only one attribute strength per Star

**Which Props?** Houses and manors which act as Focus Props

**Which Optional Rules?** Bartering the Terms, Helping Hand, Special Scenes, and Stunts

That is all there is too it. The Jane Austin Roleplaying Game is ready to play. You may use this Screenplay as it is now – or expand it with elaborate special scenes, house plans, maps of the English countryside, Extras, portraits, and a kettle of proper English tea.

After you have created a Screenplay, please remember to share it. You never know when some other player might be looking for exactly what you have already created – or something close enough that your work will be very useful. The best place to share Screenplays is at the C.O.R.E. Wiki.

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# Scene 22:

# Screenplay Guidesheet

**What is the name of your Stage?** _____

**What is your inspiration?** _____

**What are the tone and theme?**

**Tone:** _____, _____, and _____

**Theme:** _____ and _____

**Who are the Stars?**_____

**Who are the Extras?**_____

**Which Special Effects?**_____

**What things might the Actors want to do?**_____

**Which Attributes?** _____, _____, _____, and _____

**Which Skills?** _____

_____

**Which Talents?** _____

_____

**Will you use Attribute or Skill Descriptions?**_____

**Will you use Props?**_____

_____

**Which Optional Rules?** Check in the space after each rule for all that you choose.

   Optional Rules for Everyone: Criticals ( ), Fumbles ( ), Attribute Descriptions ( ), Skill Descriptions ( ), Advancement through Backstories ( ), Initiative as a Die Roll ( ), Initiative as a Conflict Roll ( ), Props ( )

   Optional Rules for the Directors: Salary Bonuses of Story Points ( ), Salary Advances of Story Points ( ), Rehearsal Points ( ), Rehearsal Bonuses ( ), Rehearsal Advances ( ), Encounter Blocks ( ) Optional Rules for Actors: No Stunt Double ( ), Bartering the Terms ( ), Stunts ( ), Helping Hand ( ), the Money Shot ( )

   Ways to Use Story Points: Advancement through Story Points ( ), Improve Actions ( ), Activate Weaknesses ( ), Staying Alive ( ), Being Talented ( )

   Special Scenes: In Media Res ( ), Flashbacks ( ), Mission Briefings ( ), Training Montages ( ), Healing Scenes ( ), Chase Scenes ( ), Duels ( ), Song and Dance Numbers ( ), Wrap Parties ( ), Blooper Reels ( )

   Other Rules_____

_____

_____

   **Create Que Cards for your Actors.**

# Act 4:  License

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last edited: November 7, 2016